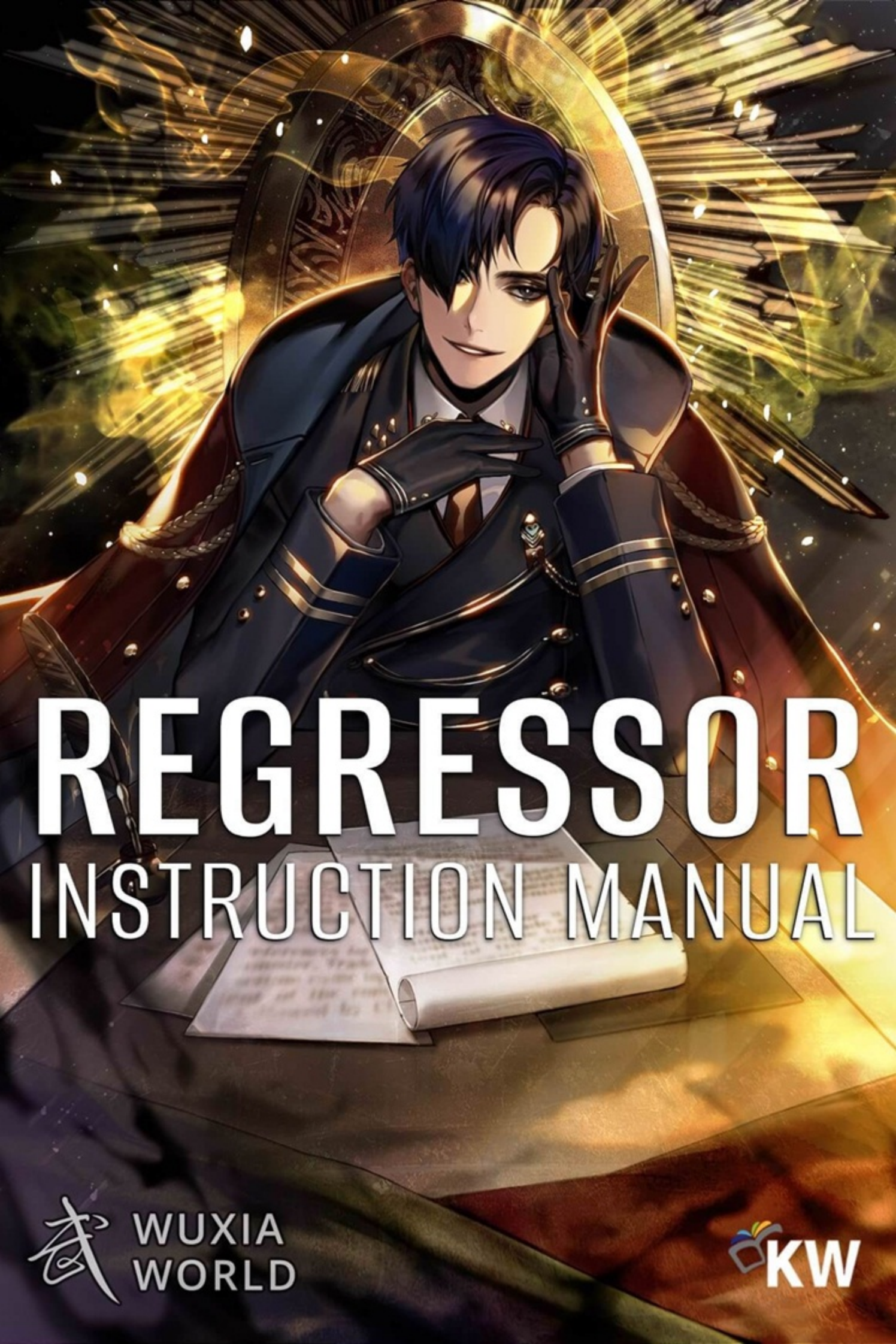
REGRESSOR
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REGRESSOR INSTRUCTION MANUAL

– 회귀자 사용설명서 –

- VOLUME 7 -

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[WUXIAWORLD]

CHAPTER 300
LAIOS, THE NEUTRAL NATION (1)

I was worried, but I dealt with Jung Ha-Yan appropriately. I wanted to angrily ask her what the hell she was doing, but that was out of the question. Jung Ha-Yan tried to test Cha Hee-Ra, while Cha Hee-Ra had overreacted. They were both at fault, but if I took Cha Hee-Ra's side, it could cause other issues.

After scolding her for her behavior, I pointed out that she seemed to have become a bit more respectful to Cha Hee-Ra, and she even expressed that she wasn't uncomfortable with her. Obviously, I gave her lip service by thanking her for caring about me or that I understood her feelings. Jung Ha-Yan cried at first, but after giving her a carrot, she seemed to be feeling better, and although things didn't work out the way she wanted, she was satisfied with how things had ended.

'Shit… '

Jung Ha-Yan was still free to think of whatever she wanted, and even though she nodded at my stern warning, I couldn't help but be suspicious about how long it would last. The whip may put her in despair, but the carrot made her recover just as fast.

No matter how much I thought about it, the previous incidents were previews of the disaster that would take place in the future, and for some reason, I couldn't help but keep thinking that way. Seeing that she had challenged Cha Hee-Ra right after gaining power, she would obviously do that more often to others. It felt like I was watching a speeding runaway locomotive, and if I left her alone, she would blow up someday, even though she was quiet right now.

Magic was an area I had a hard time understanding from the beginning. Even ordinary mages would have a difficult time understanding magic, so when a mage like Jung Ha-Yan was on a roll, it was difficult to imagine what she would be capable of doing, and I guarantee that she would use spells beyond my imagination.

'It'll be difficult, but… '

Despite that, I cared for Jung Ha-Yan a lot, and in some ways, this was an equivalent trade. If the price of dealing with Jung Ha-Yan were to take care of her mental health, I would say I got the better end of the deal. The issue was that it was getting unusually dangerous, but when thinking about the future, it should be quite bearable.

Of course, I had to take care of Cha Hee-Ra as well, but she was easier to handle. Out of all the people I knew, she was the easiest to talk to when she wasn't crazy.

From my point of view, it would be best if the two remained this way without any conflict, but things wouldn't work out that easily. There was a strange atmosphere even when we had all gotten inside the carriage. Jung Ha-Yan wasn't picking a fight with Cha Hee-Ra, but everyone could tell there was a strange air between them.

"I'm telling you, Ha-Yan noonim seems like she's on edge!" Park Deok-Gu shouted.

"Is that right?" I asked.

"Yes. I told you this several times. I know you're busy, and you haven't been able to do much, but even the soft-hearted noonim gets stressed out!" he continued.

"…"

"The way I see it, it's now time for a refresher. That mercenary noonim also seemed like she was on edge, but the look in Ha-Yan noonim's eyes looked a bit threatening. It's kind of hard for me to describe it, but… I was honestly kind of scared, too. I feel bad for saying this, but I wanted to run away from that place," he described.

When I glanced over at Han Sora, I noticed her trembling.

"The eyes of the Love Doctor Park Deok-Gu are reliable. You can trust me. To be honest, you and Ha-Yan noonim seem to be getting along, but the progress of your relationship is too slow, and since you're so popular, you have women coming at you like this! And like this! *Ahem*. Even if the continent's view of love is open, a person like her, who can't even kill an ant, will get really stressed by something like that. I'm sure of it! Don't you agree?" Park Deok-Gu asked Han Sora.

"Yes… I agree…" Han Sora answered.

I was curious about where he got the information that Jung Ha-Yan couldn't even kill

an ant, but I didn't have the energy to argue with him. Han Sora, Jung Ha-Yan's biggest victim, looked at Park Deok-Gu as if she was asking, *"What kind of bullshit are you talking about?"*

Since he was her superior, Han Sora simply nodded at his words. However, she looked as if she was preparing for whatever was coming while keeping her mouth shut.

"I think you two should go on a trip. You should visit that Baron Nabbot or whatever; no, he's Senator Nabbot now! Didn't he say there was a mirror lake in his territory or something? You should visit and go on a boat ride and enjoy dinner together until there's no more carriage heading back to Lindel…" Park Deok-Gu suggested.

"The Mirror Lake is in the opposite direction, and who cares about the carriage when I have a griffon?" I pointed out.

"Don't you know that's all an excuse? That's what you're supposed to do in a relationship. *Ahem.* I can't really tell you much, but… that's how everyone acts in a relationship," he added.

"I'm sure we'll visit one day—"

"But not right now, right?" Park Deok-Gu asked, interrupting me.

"We can take a break at Laios, and they'll be taking care of us anyway. We'll be pretty busy afterward, but we're lucky enough that we get to rest. Anyway, I'll take your suggestion and go out with Ha-Yan or something," I told him.

Kasugano Yuno was also heading toward Laios, and aside from Lee Ji-Hye of the Black Swan Guild, the people with deep connections with me were all here. The incident I had with Yuno bothered me, so I wouldn't bring that up.

'Shit… '

At that time, I just said nothing happened and overlooked it. I actually got angry and overcame the incident with it, but for Jung Ha-Yan, I was sure that incident was still in her mind. There was no guarantee that she wouldn't start a fight with Kasugano Yuno like what she had done with Cha Hee-Ra.

'Yuno is different from Cha Hee-Ra… '

Kasugano Yuno was strong enough to be one of the Eight Seats, but she was a support-type character and based on combat power, she wouldn't be able to handle Jung Ha-Yan.

'She won't pull something crazy like what she did at the shrine… '

After Jung Ha-Yan's regression incident, I was sure she wouldn't have those crazy thoughts again, but since something could still happen, I had to consider spending time with her alone.

While I was deep in my thoughts, I heard Park Deok-Gu's voice and seeing that he didn't change the topic, he had to have felt pretty sensitive about this incident. However, it didn't seem like he was worried about the same thing as me.

"By the way… what are you going to do about that mercenary noonim and Ha-Yan noonim? To be honest, I'm going to be on Ha-Yan noonim's side no matter what, but I feel pretty uncomfortable. The atmosphere between them is scarier than an actual fight. How about setting up something so that they can talk…"

'That's someone seeking death would do… '

"I heard that there have been several recent incidents like this on the continent. This type of war of nerves is happening because of the whole polyandry and polygamy issue. I drank with a friend once, and I heard he had two wives," Park Deok-Gu continued.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"I'm sure you know him… it's Galoshik," Park Deok-Gu answered.

"Of course, I know him. He's pretty useful… How did you get in contact with him?" I questioned.

I was actually going to reach out to Galoshik, but knowing that he was close to Park Deok-Gu, there was no need for me to step up anymore.

"I gave love advice, of course! Anyway, since he's operating a clan and is competent himself, he ended up having two wives, but the two don't get along. They would glare at each other whenever they met, talk behind their backs, raise their voices, and fight, so he ended up in a predicament," Park Deok-Gu replied.

'That's nothing… It's better than me.'

I wasn't sure whether Park Deok-Gu understood my feelings or not, but he continued talking while giving examples. It was a pretty lengthy story, so I wasn't really listening.

"*Ahem*… Anyway, that's what happened. You need to stay on your toes during situations like this, hyung-nim. It's best if the person in the middle adjusts and balances things out. There's a saying that the balance of power must be maintained…"

"I have never heard of that," I commented.

"All I'm saying is that your role in situations like this is the most important. Setting up something so that those two can get along will be beneficial to all of us. Obviously, taking care of Ha-Yan noonim first is important. If you're going to keep making connections, it's better to improve your relationships little by little from now on. I guarantee that if you don't do this, you'll be in big danger," he warned.

I was sure he said it without much thought, but I took him seriously when he mentioned the potential danger. After all, Park Deok-Gu was right.

'I have to do something… '

If I kept on making connections, I may end up getting on a boat that would really benefit me. I had the urge to stage an act once again, so I wanted to call Kim Ye-Ri and Ahn Ki-Mo, but they weren't in this carriage, and they weren't in Laios either.

'We're almost there… '

Now that I thought about it, it felt like we had been riding the carriage for a long time. I looked around while talking to Park Deok-Gu and Han Sora, and I saw the scenery changing at a pretty fast pace. I was just guessing, but the scenery was a lot more exotic and different from the democratic country, and they all stood out for me.

'The neutral nation.'

This was the only neutral nation on the continent. Even though they didn't possess strong national power like the democratic country or the Republic, they were one of the countries with immense potential. Since they were located in the south, they had

a variety of warm food, and since they were close to the ocean, they were a tourist destination for many foreigners from the democratic country and the Republic.

Even though we didn't come here for a vacation or to take care of Jung Ha-Yan, Park Deok-Gu was right—I had to do something.

"The scenery is amazing… Don't you agree, hyung-nim? Is it your first time seeing scenery like this, Sora?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Yes, it's definitely my first time…" Han Sora replied.

"Anyway, this is your chance, hyung-nim. Places like this make people become more open-minded! I'm sure noonim is preparing her mind as well," he added.

I would have to look into exactly what she was preparing herself for, but if possible, I didn't want her to prepare her mind. Obviously, all these were just my wish.

The moving carriage came to a stop, and when the door opened, I heard a slightly childish voice.

"Welcome to Laios, Father Lee Ki-Young and Mercenary Queen of Lindel."

We had arrived in the neutral nation, Laios.

CHAPTER 301
LAIOS, THE NEUTRAL NATION (2)

As soon as I got out of the carriage, I saw a person with beautiful brown skin, and I could tell they were from a different region. Unlike the democratic citizens who looked like a typical white person, they looked different, and if I had to compare them to a race on Earth, they looked like they were from South America. Their healthy, supple skin and glossy black hair stood out the most. The most interesting part was their outfit. Unlike the democratic country, whose outfits resembled the Middle Ages, their outfit looked pretty light.

'It's definitely because it's hot… '

Maybe it was because we traveled south, but it was really hot, and it was to the point that I wanted to take my suffocating clothes off. It was fine inside the carriage since temperature-control magic was always on, but when I stepped outside, I struggled.

'Ah… I'm dumb.'

One thing I overlooked was the outfit of the people of Laios around us.

'I'm sure nothing will happen.'

The issue was that everyone's outfit was extremely loose. It may be considered an ordinary outfit here, but I had to think about where to lay my eyes on. Similar to the outfits female dancers wore, both men and women were showing off their bodies, so naturally, I was worried about Jung Ha-Yan.

She was absorbed in her magic training inside the carriage, but when she came outside, she frowned.

'I just have to be careful.'

As long as I didn't look around like a fool, nothing would happen. Moreover, she had gotten scolded before we arrived here, so I was sure she wouldn't cause any trouble.

Anyway, since she greeted us first, it was only right for us to greet her back. While I was focused on the exotic scenery, Cha Hee-Ra finished her greeting, so I stepped forward.

'15… Maybe 16 years old?'

The kid I saw looked like they were in middle school. She had brown skin like the others, but what caught my attention was the unique decoration on top of her glossy braided hair. She looked pretty proud, but she greeted us politely, and it was Laios' long custom to tap the red diamond-shaped pattern on their forehead. It was awkward, but I didn't think it was a bad idea to greet like that. Even though there wasn't anything on my forehead, I had to show respect for Laios' culture as much as possible, so I did the same. If the kid in front of me were an ordinary kid, I would have just bowed, but…

'She was Pristina, Laios' 27th Queen.'

Since the kid who looked like she got tanned from being outside most of the time was the queen, I couldn't treat her the same way I treat other kids.

"Hello again. I'm Pristina of the neutral nation, Laios," Pristina introduced.

"I've heard a lot about you, Miss Pristina. It's truly an honor to meet you. I didn't expect you to come out in person, so I'm not sure how to react to your excessive hospitality," I greeted.

"It's nothing, Father Lee Ki-Young. It's my honor to meet a key member of the democratic country," she said.

"Please treat me comfortably," I told her.

"No, I can't do that since you're an important guest. Anyway, let's head inside first," she suggested.

"Thank you…"

'It's not going to be easy.'

We only greeted each other, but based on the conversation, I was certain it would be difficult for me to get what I wanted.

'She has her guard up… '

Pristina knew very well why we traveled all the way here, and the goal of this delegation was to create an alliance with Laios. The way she emphasized *neutral* and her attitude of not wanting to treat me comfortably showed her that she wouldn't get swayed by me.

'From their perspective, it's understandable… '

A country could only become neutral if they were strong enough to protect itself, but this small country was weak compared to the Sacred Democratic Country and the Republic. The number of named powerful people, the quality of their army, and even the foreigners was of low quality. And the reason why they were able to remain a neutral nation was ironic, but it was because they were located between the Sacred Democratic Country and the Republic. Laios had always been in the middle when the two sides fought, and in some ways, it was a strategic point for both sides. The Republic could cross the sea or enter the Sacred Democratic Country through Laios. If Laios and the democratic country became allies, the Republic could get pushed back, but that applied to the democratic country as well. The two sides had also been considering bringing Laios down, so the nation had been receiving unwanted pain.

There was a slight change after the Second Continental War. The empire and the Republic had almost destroyed each other because of the war, so they had no choice but to declare a ceasefire. Laios also announced their complete neutrality by saying that they wouldn't take anyone's side. The empire and the Republic accepted and respected their decision. I had no idea why they accepted it at the time, but I figured it involved many political reasons. It could be because they were worried that Laios would provide support to the enemy, or maybe the leaders had come to an agreement behind the scenes.

Regardless of the reason, one thing I was sure of was that the leaders of Laios were all wise. Their political skills, as well as their ability to make connections, were above average.

'It's amazing… '

To stay independent while in between those with power wasn't an easy task. They weren't as strong as the Sacred Democratic Country or the Republic, but they still had some power. I didn't know what the foreigners of Laios were thinking about, but

I was sure the denizens here were very proud of their nation.

When I looked behind, I saw Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu following us slowly while talking. Of course, Han Sora was maintaining her distance as usual.

'I think I can relax for now.'

Jung Ha-Yan was wary of her surroundings, but she didn't seem like she would cause trouble anytime soon. I was sure her mood would improve if I asked her to hang out with me tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.

Unlike her, Cha Hee-Ra and I, the main members of this envoy, were walking with Pristina. It was interesting that we were walking instead of riding a carriage, but I had a feeling as to what this child was up to.

'It's a nice place… '

Despite the fact that the living standards of this place weren't high, the smiles on people's faces showed that they were happy. I wasn't sure if the continent had surveys similar to the Gross National Happiness on Earth, but if it existed here as well, I was sure this nation would be at the top of the list. You could tell by how the denizens were cheering for Pristina and how she greeted each and every one of them.

The faces of the people from the city were full of life, and the tourists looked natural as tourists. The people from Dawan who came here to rest and the people dressed slightly differently from the people of the democratic country were probably from the Republic. There was a strange tension between them, but since this place wasn't classified as a conflict zone under continental law, they were trying to avoid conflict.

'So, a place like this does exist.'

I couldn't get used to the sight no matter how much I looked, and that was when the kid with decorations all over her head spoke up.

"I heard this is your first time here."

"It is…" Cha Hee-Ra replied.

"Yes, that's right," I answered.

“What do you think about Laios?” asked the Queen.

I knew what kind of answer she wanted to hear and what she would say, but what she would say was such a reasonable argument it would be hard for me to refute. Cha Hee-Ra discreetly told me to answer, and despite knowing where this conversation was headed, I had no choice but to answer.

“It’s great. The people look full of life, and everyone looks like they’re satisfied with their lifestyle. It’s to the point that I think this place is an ideal place to live.”

“I’m really grateful that you think that way. As the person who fought with the denizens to provide them with better lives, I’m happy to hear that from you, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Pristina complimented.

She lightly smiled before continuing, “It’s just like you said. Of course, this nation has a few issues, but not only am I proud of what our predecessors had achieved, but I want to protect it as well.”

I knew it…

“It took them a really long time to properly lead a nation that had always been suffering between two powerful nations. Aside from the first and second continental wars, there had been many small wars, invasions of outside forces, and even the great famine. Our nation has shed a lot of blood to protect our ideals and independence. Of course, we’re grateful that the democratic country and the Republic consider Laios as an important nation, but to be honest, it’s burdensome to have this much attention,” she continued

“I understand,” I said.

“That’s probably the reason why you came here, Father Lee Ki-Young. I’m sorry for completely refusing your offer even before you start talking about it, but Laios would like to remain neutral. We told the Republic the same thing, so the leaders of both sides don’t have to worry,” she informed me.

Basically, she didn’t want the nation to suffer again because if one side gained more power than the other, then they would lose everything the nation had achieved so far.

‘I can relate to that… ’

It felt like I was seeing myself standing between Jung Ha-Yan and Cha Hee-Ra, and regardless of the side, I wanted to stay neutral. I was sure that right now—I was ready to scream *"neutral nation"* more than the character in the novel, *The Square.*

Basically, Laios wanted to remain a neutral nation, but I couldn't stand by and watch them do that.

'This is a shitty situation.'

This was a typical case of double standards.

"That's not exactly the reason why we're here, Miss Pristina. I'll explain the other issues one by one, but you're being too hasty…"

"I see. You're right, Father Lee Ki-Young. I was a bit hasty. However… please consider it our way of delivering our intentions clearly. Of course, I welcome you to our nation. We're thankful and are always prepared to welcome those who visit Laios. Welcoming the delegation that traveled all the way here is a part of our job as well," she explained.

"Thank you."

"It's an old custom and pride of this place to show appreciation to friends from afar," she added.

"*Ahh*…"

"You must be tired, so I'll guide you to your rooms. *Ah*, you said it was your first time here. It's embarrassing for me to say this, but there are many things a couple can enjoy together. I heard that Miss Cha Hee-Ra and Mr. Lee Ki-Young's good relationship spans all the way from the continent the foreigners came from… I think it'll be a great idea if you take your time looking around," Pristina suggested.

"We appreciate your hospitality," Cha Hee-Ra said.

Jung Ha-Yan seemed like she was in a good mood earlier, but for some reason, I was afraid to turn around. I wasn't sure if Jung Ha-Yan had the same intention as me—like destroying their neutrality—but her gaze just now looked pretty sharp.

"You two look really good together," Pristina complimented.

My back started to feel cold…

'She's not doing this on purpose, right?'

I couldn't help but be slightly suspicious of the continuous comments.

"There's a rock where you'll stay together forever if you whisper words of love, and many people who visit Laios visit that rock as well. If you have tomorrow, you two should…"

'Stop it.'

I knew Pristina had no ill intentions, but I wanted to cover her mouth because Jung Ha-Yan's cheeks had puffed.

CHAPTER 302
LAIOS, THE NEUTRAL NATION (3)

Pristina's sharp attacks made me nervous, but what I thought throughout the banquet held for the delegation was that Laios was a more peaceful and pleasant place to live than I thought. I didn't know if it was because of the exotic scenery or the unique citizens, but I understood why many people visited Laios. They didn't like conflict and valued harmony. The majority of the denizens valued self-control and considered it the most valuable, and the behavior of some of the citizens reminded me of Buddhism back on Earth.

The jobs that stood out to me were Monk and Ascetics. They could be classified as priests, but the essence of the jobs was different from the Holy Knights of the Sacred Democratic Country. The Holy Knights sought belief in the goddess while they sought spiritual discipline. A religious conflict was possible, but that didn't happen because the people of Laios believed in Mahara, an ally of the Goddess of Benigoa.

Goddess Mahara's doctrine wasn't faith in oneself but the development and happiness of her followers. I was certain that the doctrine of the goddess they served was the foundation of their lifestyle.

'It's a nice place.'

Because of that, the entire nation was simple and economical, but since they couldn't treat their guests from the Sacred Democratic Country poorly, they held this banquet and thought that it was pretty impressive in their eyes. I was sure they were worried about treating the delegates badly because the Sacred Democratic Country was a large country. Even after the citizens' revolution, the democratic country was still at the heart of the continent's political scene, so it was understandable that they would think that way.

I had been invited to many events, but this was my first time being treated like this. The dancers' dance was beautiful, and their culture and music were pleasant to the ears. It had been a while since I got a proper vacation, so I was already pretty drunk when the banquet was about to end.

“How was the banquet?” Pristina asked.

“It was fun, and we are undeserving of the treatment we received. I don’t know how to express my appreciation for the grand welcome,” I answered.

“I’m relieved to hear that you’re satisfied. I was worried that the food and drink wouldn’t be to your liking, so I’m glad to hear that. I’ve prepared a house you can stay in while you’re here. The Red Mercenary and Blue Guild members can use it separately, so I suggest staying there with the delegates and start looking around Laios tomorrow,” she suggested.

“I appreciate your hospitality, Miss Pristina,” I said.

‘We’re being treated pretty well… ’

I felt this earlier, but it seemed like she knew what to do to put me in a good mood. However, it wasn’t like she was groveling at me. Pristina had already refused my offer to become allies, so this banquet was her way of apologizing to me.

It was getting dark, so it was time to head back. When I slowly stood up, the accumulated alcohol in my body struck me all at once.

‘The alcohol has to be stronger than I thought.’

This was all because I recklessly drank while thinking that the alcohol was sweet.

The long journey tired me out, and Park Deok-Gu had to have realized how tired I was because he approached me quietly and helped me up. Jung Ha-Yan also grabbed my arm, afraid that someone else might take it, and during all this, Cha Hee-Ra was talking to the kid. Cha Hee-Ra discreetly waved her hand, telling us to head back. Park Deok-Gu nodded, and we left the banquet after saying goodbye.

‘I’m really tired… ’

Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan looked fine. Since there was a difference between our stats, I thought I became drunk a bit quicker than I had expected. Even Han Sora didn’t look as tired as me, so I got sad about my low stamina.

“*Geez,* don’t you think you drank a bit too much? I don’t think I’ve ever seen you this drunk,” Park Deok-Gu commented.

“Did I? I’m just really tired today,” I said.

“I kind of understand how you feel, hyung-nim. It has been a while since we had a banquet like this, and everyone was really nice as well,” he agreed.

“You’re right.”

“Anyway, just rest today and go out tomorrow with noonim. I heard there are a lot of interesting sights here,” he suggested.

“Oh, yeah?” I asked.

“They have something called the Cave of Truth, and many say that it’s the legacy of the goddess discovered hundreds of years ago. I don’t really know what it is, but it seems like there are cultural heritages and relics there that are being protected by continental law. There’s a law in Laios that prohibits people from hunting endangered monsters, so don’t you think those monsters are being taken care of as well?” he asked.

“Technically, the democratic country is also taking extra care of the items related to the Goddess of Benigoa,” I mentioned.

“*Ah*, is that right?” he asked.

“Yeah…”

“Anyway, it’s a better place than I thought,” Park Deok-Gu added.

“Yes…”

‘Man, I'm so tired.’

This is the side effect of continuously drinking the drink Jung Ha-Yan had been handing over to me. She was definitely worried because she walked with us while holding onto my arm, but the reality was that both of us were being dragged away by Park Deok-Gu.

Not long after we left, we saw a large house. The house had an exotic style, but the inside was similar to the houses back home. As such, I became certain that this house was used every time delegates from the Sacred Democratic Country visited Laios.

“I-I’ll take care of him from here,” Jung Ha-Yan offered.

“*Huh?*”

“I can carry him to the bedroom,” she added.

“Alright, I’ll leave it up to you!” Park Deok-Gu exclaimed.

“O-Okay, I’ll do that,” she stuttered.

Park Deok-Gu gave a thumbs up as if this was a good situation for the both of us, but unfortunately, I didn’t have the energy to do anything, as I was on the verge of passing out. I was already half-asleep, so I couldn’t even cause trouble even if I wanted to.

‘I’m glad I don’t need to wash up.’

Magic was useful in situations like this, and after we entered the large room, I naturally laid down on the bed. When Jung Ha-Yan asked, *“D-Do you want me to wash you?”* I quietly signaled her to do it, and even while I was slowly falling asleep, I thought about what I should do with Laios. It wasn’t an urgent matter, but the democratic country needed an ally right now and asking the Republic was out of the question. The Union of Kingdoms were not only wary of us, but they were ready to attack us, so the only nations we could ask for an alliance with us were Laios and the Kingdom of Others.

I thought about how I should approach the nation that wanted to maintain its neutrality, but the problem was that I couldn’t come up with an answer. I could either find their weakness or worsen their relationship with the Republic, but…

‘It’s not good to be hasty, so I’ll take my time with it.’

Laios was treating us well on the outside, but they were really wary of us, and I was sure they were keeping their distance from the Republic as well.

‘I’m getting a headache… ’

Despite the fact that I could rest comfortably, I kept thinking about these things, which proved that I was a workaholic. I thought it would be a good idea to take the kid’s advice and just rest tomorrow.

With that thought, I closed my eyes, and when I felt the sun on my face, I jumped up from my bed. It was already morning.

"*Ugh*… my head."

"Are you awake, oppa?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"*Oh*, Ha-Yan. What time is it?" I asked.

When I turned my head to where the voice came from, I saw Jung Ha-Yan standing by the door while holding a large bowl.

"It's three o'clock right now," she replied.

"Three?" I repeated.

"Yes. I-I thought you would wake up around this time, so I brought you some warm stew. I made it myself! And you woke up just in time," she exclaimed.

"It's already that late?" I questioned.

"Yes…"

"I felt like I only slept for a few hours… Why is my body so tired?" I asked

"*Uhhh*… Because you overdid it yesterday," she answered.

Jung Ha-Yan was right, and when I looked at her, she smiled. She was definitely in a good mood today. When the female dancers appeared yesterday, I was worried because she puffed her cheeks, but thankfully, she seemed like she wasn't annoyed by that incident anymore. It seemed that she had slept well as well because she looked exuberant.

'Her skin looks good, too.'

It was hard to believe that we had been drinking together last night. I wasn't sure if she used magic, but her glossy skin made her look as if she had applied oil to it, and she also gave off this strong feeling of joy which made me feel relieved. The many issues I had to handle were giving me headaches, so I was happy to see her like this.

“You must be tired… You should eat this and sleep more…” Jung Ha-Yan suggested.

“I’m okay, and I can’t just sleep all day after coming all the way here. I just need to drink a bottle of potion and move around. Where’s Hee-Ra noona? Actually, is Deok-Gu here?” I asked.

“*Ah,* they left with Miss Sora and all the members of the Red Mercenary Guild. I think they’re going to walk around Laios today. They said to let them know when you wake up,” she answered.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes…”

“We have a lot of time, so let’s take it slow. *Ah*, wait, Ha-Yan,” I called out.

“Y-Yes?”

“Recently, I have been negligent to you, right?” I questioned.

“N-No, you haven’t… it’s because you’re busy, and you h-have a lot on your plate as well, so I understand,” she muttered.

“Thanks for being understanding,” I said.

Jung Ha-Yan looked down when I lightly kissed her forehead, and she looked kind of cute when her ears turned red.

Anyway, we couldn’t just stay inside all day, so after drinking Jung Ha-Yan’s bland and strange stew, I got ready to go out.

‘It would’ve been nice if Aris was here.’

I couldn’t imagine treating the leader of a country like a maid, so I realized that my exhaustion was making me have strange thoughts. Usually, I would feel uncomfortable by it, but at times like this, I wished for that kind of treatment. No matter how hard Jung Ha-Yan tried to take care of me, the difference between a pro and an amateur was huge. I was grateful for her concern, but her running around to take care of me was slowing my preparation down.

“Let’s head out,” I told her.

“Okay!”

“It has been a while since we were on a date, right?” I asked.

“Yes! Y-You’re right!” she exclaimed.

‘Yeah, I’m taking her out today.’

We had to meet up with Cha Hee-Ra afterward, but staying together, even if it was just a short time, was important to Jung Ha-Yan. And since she was already in a good mood, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to elevate her mood even more. After all, she might stay quiet for the time being and even improve her relationship with Cha Hee-Ra a bit.

‘It’ll be one less thing for me to worry about… ’

Thanks to Jung Ha-Yan, I was happy.

I thought everything would work out, but it didn’t take long for me to realize that something bad was going to happen.

‘Why are you there, noona?’

I couldn’t really recall my memories of her, as well as her name, but the woman was very familiar. The first time I met her was at the black market, and the second time was when she helped me during the time when Cha Hee-Ra went berserk. She was the only person in the Republic I had a connection with; she was a member of the Republic’s proud Five Tiger Generals, and she was the wielder of the legendary-ranked weapon, Urd, The Whip That Punished the Goddess. Out of all the unique habits I had seen so far, she was one of those with the shittiest habits.

‘Xiaolin?’

I couldn’t help but quickly turn back.

‘Shit… ’

It was all because I felt guilty about something.

CHAPTER 303
THE MOUTH OF THE TIGER (1)

'Today is not my lucky day… '

Unless I was blind, that woman was definitely Xiaolin, and the information Mind's Eye displayed proved that she was the same person I had seen back then. Her stats had increased, but her habit, job, and everything else were exactly the same. Even her minions were the same. I was certain the bag one of her minions was carrying as they were visiting the shops on the street contained a legendary-ranked weapon.

I walked out of the house in joy and was looking forward to walking around Laios, but after seeing a person I didn't want to meet, I immediately turned around.

'Shit… '

Xiaolin had agreed to help under the condition that I meet with her not long afterward, but it had already been over a year since I made that promise. I could still recall the letter she sent that said, *"You better keep your promise."*

Since Xiaolin was a strong person who was just as crazy as Jung Ha-Yan and Cha Hee-Ra, I didn't know what kind of trouble she would cause. And if that crazy woman and Jung Ha-Yan met, an accident could happen within this neutral nation.

Jung Ha-Yan was kind of surprised by my sudden behavior, so she started looking around, but I never imagined that I would hear Xiaolin's surprised voice.

"*Huh?*"

Jung Ha-Yan seemed kind of lost, but she heard that woman's voice clearly.

'Has she caught on?'

At the center of the road filled with tourists and citizens of Laios, I heard her particularly loud voice, so I immediately pulled Jung Ha-Yan's arm.

'Let's go, let's go… '

Since Jung Ha-Yan was walking while looking forward, she still hadn't caught onto the fact that Xiaolin had noticed me.

"Oppa, just now—"

"I don't want to be interrupted by anyone right now," I interrupted her.

"*Ah*, o-oppa."

The fact that I promised to secretly meet the crazy woman of the Republic was something Jung Ha-Yan didn't need to know.

It didn't take long for me to drag the slightly emotional Jung Ha-Yan out of the crowd, and even though I got the feeling that we had gotten pretty far from Xiaolin, I was still becoming more anxious.

'Maybe I should've gone in the opposite direction.'

Or…

'I should go meet Hee-Ra noona, right?'

As long as I could get away from Xiaolin, the direction I was heading didn't matter. However, just then, Jung Ha-Yan whispered.

"Oppa…"

"Yeah?"

"I think someone is following us," she said.

"What?"

"There are three people following us. I don't know their exact location, but I think they're the same people with that woman earlier," she added.

"Are you sure it's not the shadows of the Red Mercenary Guild?" I asked.

“Yes, I’m sure of it. I think they’re those people with that woman. I don’t know the details, but I’m sure of it,” she replied.

‘Ah… ’

“What should we do?” she asked.

“Just leave them for now. We can slowly lose them. What about that woman?” I asked.

“I don’t think I see that woman. I’m not sure why, but those people look like they’re trying not to get caught either, and they’re still kind of far from us. D-Do you know them?” she questioned.

“Somewhat…” I answered.

I was glad to hear that they weren’t trying to start trouble, and I even thought that maybe it would have been a good idea to just approach and greet her, but…

‘She’s a crazy bitch, too.’

Xiaolin was a VIP of the black market, and I could tell that she wasn’t an ordinary woman. Even though the meaning behind her habit, A Strangling Romantist, was none of my business, I didn’t want to be strangled to death at this age.

Not only could Xiaolin think properly, but she was probably really angry, so I was sure she would show some kind of reaction, and Jung Ha-Yan would most likely react to that.

Now that I had confirmed she was in Laios, I thought it would be a good idea for me to contact her first. Of course, it would be best for me to leave this place before anything else and act like I didn’t see her. After dragging Jung Ha-Yan to a place where there were a lot of people, we started walking around the outskirts of the city. During all of this, she had to have thought that our date was ruined because she puffed her cheeks, but I obviously couldn’t focus on our date. It was because Jung Ha-Yan was still telling me about the people following us. I had no idea when that crazy woman with the whip was going to show up, so I was worried. To make things worse, Jung Ha-Yan was on edge, and after recalling the Lindel terrorist incident, it was understandable for her to feel sensitive about this because that incident had started out just like this.

In the end, we walked through the alleys of different stores and thanks to Jung Ha-Yan's magic, we managed to lose Xiaolin's men, but…

'Where are we?'

The problem was that we had gotten too far out. We weren't lost, and since I had a reliable bodyguard, I wasn't rattled, but thinking about going back was giving me a headache. I was looking forward to properly enjoying Laios, but I couldn't help but sigh at the situation. And even though she wasn't showing it, Jung Ha-Yan looked kind of disappointed. It had been a while since we were alone, and she had been really looking forward to this moment. Moreover, she had no idea when she would get this chance again, so she considered this a rare opportunity for us to have fun. Basically, an intruder had ruined her exciting plan.

"I think we should come back next time. Today has been a hectic day," I suggested.

"Okay… oppa," she said.

My original goal of making Jung Ha-Yan happy had already been destroyed, and all I could do was pray that taking her to a decent restaurant would help her feel better. There were many decent restaurants nearby, and it was time to eat anyway, so I grabbed Jung Ha-Yan's hand and started walking.

'What do I tell Hee-Ra noona?'

Just like how I needed to help Jung Ha-Yan feel better, I had to spend time with Cha Hee-Ra as well, which was giving me a headache.

We soon walked into the place we chose, and I really liked the interior design of this restaurant. It gave off a luxurious feel in its own way, and the crowded restaurant somehow gave off a nice atmosphere. I found it a little bit strange that there were a lot of people with black hair here rather than the citizens of Laios with their brown skin. Moreover, there were even Caucasians who looked a bit different from the citizens of the Sacred Democratic Country.

'What's going on… '

I immediately realized that something was wrong, and as if to confirm my apprehension, Mind's Eye spun into action.

[Checking Player Valentin Alexandro's Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Valentin Alexandro]

[Title - Monster of Ronaf, Slaughterer of Ronaf, Republic's Five Tiger Generals]

[Age - 39]

[Nature - A simple, ignorant slaughterer]

[Job - Fighter of Ronaf - Epic Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic martial arts knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate martial arts knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced martial arts knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced magic operation knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 97/Above legendary growth limit]

[Agility - 89/Above legendary growth limit]

[Stamina - 91/Above legendary growth limit]

[Intelligence - 31/Below average growth limit]

[Endurance - 87/Above epic growth limit]

[Luck - 32/Below average growth limit]

[Magic - 61/Above epic growth limit]

[Attribute - Anger Control - Legendary Rank]

[Overall Review - His magic stat is unfortunate, but his strength, agility, and stamina are extremely well-balanced. His nature and attributes aren't great, though. I don't recommend spending a lot of time with this man unless Player Lee Ki-Young wants to die young.]

'You crazy… '

What caught my attention was that the caucasian man was as big as Park Deok-Gu. Actually, he was sitting down, but he still looked bigger than Park Deok-Gu. The long scar on his face made his intimidating visage look even more threatening. He seemed like an uncommon martial artist, and seeing that he had advanced magic operation knowledge, he was definitely at the summit. His nature sounded dangerous, but what bothered me the most was his title—Republic's Five Tiger Generals.

'Shit… '

There was another person who caught my attention. He was a black-haired man sitting at the center of the table, and his frame was similar to mine. I was certain he was Chinese. Unlike my somewhat obnoxious look, he had a pleasant face. However, his stats didn't look pleasant at all.

[Checking Player Jin Cheong's Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Jin Cheong]

[Title - Schemer, Sage on the Battlefield, Republic's Five Tiger Generals]

[Age - 30]

[Nature - Scheming Tactician]

[Job - Division Mage - Legendary Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic magic knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate magic knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced magic knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced summoning knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced magic operation knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 65/Above epic growth limit]

[Agility - 75/Above legendary growth limit]

[Stamina - 89/Above rare growth limit]

[Intelligence - 99/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 77/Above rare growth limit]

[Luck - 67/Below epic growth limit]

[Magic - 97/Above epic growth limit]

[Attribute - Not accessible.]

[Overall Review - This archmage is perfectly balanced. His stats and potential are standing out to the point that I feel bad for even comparing him to you, so I won't even mention it. Unfortunately, his magic stat can no longer increase, but his intelligence of 99 and high base stats are more than enough to offset that weakness.]

The remaining person was also part of the Republic's Five Tiger Generals, and the

others with them were pretty talented as well.

'Did they come out for a company dinner or something?'

I obviously thought about leaving this place as soon as possible. However, Jung Ha-Yan didn't read the room and urged that we take a seat, but I couldn't move my feet. To make things worse, our unexpected appearance caused people to look at us. And among them included the Russian, whose frame was bigger than Park Deok-Gu, and the Chinese, whose stats were so absurd a mage shouldn't even possess them.

'Is it strange that they don't recognize me?'

I thought about the possibility that they didn't recognize me, but it was likely that they knew me. Actually, even if they had no idea of my identity, they probably knew I was from the Sacred Democratic Country. Valentin Alexandro was the first one to stand up, and without exaggerating it, he was probably three times my size.

"Imperial—actually, are you democrats now?" Valentin asked.

His hoarse voice was uncomfortable to listen to. The Chinese member, Jin Cheong, tapped on the table while looking at me, and he seemed like he was enjoying it. I had no idea about the others, but I was certain that he knew who I was, at the very least.

Jung Ha-Yan finally realized that something was off, so when I felt her slowly releasing her magic, I had no choice but to grab her hand because it was just the two of us while they had an entire group. In addition, two of them were part of the Republic's Five Tiger Generals. I had no idea about Jung Ha-Yan, but it would be difficult for me to deal with them with my own power. Basically, if we got into a fight, I would definitely be the first one who would die.

'Even though we're in a neutral nation… '

There was no guarantee whether a fight would break out or not.

I wasn't sure if this was worse, but I heard a familiar voice behind me.

"You fuckin' idiots. How could you lose him? You're all useless pieces of shit."

'Shit… '

Our exit was completely blocked. The person who flung the door open was the woman with the whip. I was sure she was shocked, but I had no choice but to be bold and speak before she could.

“Miss Xiaolin, there you are!”

“You…”

“You have no idea how much I’ve been looking for you, *hahaha*…” I laughed.

Xiaolin didn’t look happy.

“You’re still beautiful…”

Jung Ha-Yan, who was supposed to be happy all day today, was frowning hard.

CHAPTER 304
THE MOUTH OF THE TIGER (2)

Xiaolin was confused, and she looked as if she was asking, *"What the hell is this bastard doing here?"* She had to be pretty shocked because she couldn't react to my compliment.

The large Russian and Archmage Jin Cheong looked at us with interest. They realized that we had met before.

"Is he a guest?"

Jin Cheong didn't say anything, but Valentin mumbled as if he was disappointed, and even though I didn't know why he was disappointed, one thing I was sure of was that I had to get out of here as soon as possible. When I grabbed Jung Ha-Yan's hand tightly as if telling her to calm down, her breathing became a bit more stable.

'She wasn't jealous.'

She was just extremely stressed. And when she saw that there were three strong people on the same level as her, she got worried about my safety.

"You…"

"I'm sorry for contacting you late, Miss Xiaolin…" I apologized.

"Don't you think it's a little too late for you to say that you contacted me late? I'm sure I told you that I might end up causing trouble if you don't keep your promise," she reminded me.

"Of course, I wanted to contact you, but as you know, the country has experienced a series of major events. I tried, but I just couldn't make the time… It was difficult for me as well," I explained.

"Is that right? I think we ran into each other earlier, but I guess that was my mistake. And if you came here to meet a lady, coming by yourself is proper manners, so why

did you come here with another woman? And how did you even know I was coming here?" she asked.

'Shit… I didn't think about that.'

I shouldn't have made that first comment.

I should have said, *"What a coincidence,"* instead of saying, *"There you are."* Xiaolin had spoken as if she was questioning if I was spying on the foreigners of the Republic, and Jin Cheong looked surprised as well. He could be thinking, *'were they trailing us?'* or *'were they watching us?'* but it wasn't anything like that.

We coincidentally ended up here, and it was by chance that we ran into Xiaolin, but the fact that a powerful figure from the Sacred Democratic Country was at a place located on the outskirts of the city was pretty suspicious from their point of view. They might think I had some kind of goal.

"I think you've mistaken me for someone else because we coincidentally ended up here. By the way, you haven't changed," I told her.

"The way you talk is still the same, and the way you change your attitude is still the same as well. Out of all the places here, you're saying that you coincidentally entered this place? I don't know how you found this place or how you ended up here, but you do know that you're in a bad situation, right? No matter how happy I am to see a guest, a guest who suddenly appears like this can become an intruder. Of course, it doesn't really matter to me, but I'm curious as to what my friends think about this situation… You showed up here with such confidence, but you don't seem to have anyone around you. You look like herbivores who had walked in here, asking to be eaten… What should we do? Should we eat them up?" Xiaolin asked.

'Shiiit… '

"Who is he?"

"*Ah*, I'm sure you know him, Mr. Valentin…" she replied.

"So, who is he?" Valentin repeated.

"He's the most popular person in the Sacred Democratic Country right now. He's the Sub Guild Master of the Blue Guild in Lindel, a dragon's chosen one, the first

foreigner with an official position within the Holy Empire, a member of the Eight Seats, the Mercenary Queen's—"

All of a sudden, one side of the wall broke down as a roaring noise filled the place. I didn't know why, but Valentin suddenly punched the wall, and Jung Ha-Yan reacted instinctively by opening her eyes and moving her hands. She had a contract with beasts that could protect her, but a sword was instantly pulled out from behind her. A dagger was pointing at her neck, but Jung Ha-Yan opened her mouth as if she didn't care. She was probably going to cast the spell even at the expense of her life, but I couldn't afford to lose her in a ridiculous situation like this.

"Stop!"

Everyone stopped moving, including those pointing their swords at Jung Ha-Yan. A streak of blood rolled down Jung Ha-Yan's pale skin, and Xiaolin sheathed her dagger.

"You and half the people here would have died if you had unleashed that spell… What happened just now wasn't a big deal, so there's no need to get worked up. Miss Mage, that guy over there is just somewhat hot-headed," Xiaolin explained.

'So, why did you react in that way?'

"*Ah*, it's all because he had gotten into an incident with that red gorilla a while back. He got brutally defeated, right? And that scar was from that gorilla as well. He reacts like that every time the Mercenary Queen is mentioned… Maybe it would have been better if I didn't mention her," Xiaolin added.

Xiaolin giggled. It had apparently been just a simple joke, but it was pretty dangerous. The guy looked like a bomb about to explode at any moment, and he was glaring at us with his bloodshot eyes. He was breathing roughly, and his energy was oppressing us. I almost couldn't stop my legs from shaking, but pretending to be weak wouldn't be helpful. However, I felt like I was a mouse in front of a cat.

When Jung Ha-Yan grabbed my hand while biting her lips, I felt kind of relieved, and that was when that bastard suddenly swung his fist.

'Crazy bastard!'

The wind pressure caused the items around us to fly around, and it sounded like the air was being ripped apart. Jung Ha-Yan bit her lips, and I tried to move my hand, but

Xiaolin standing behind me was bothering me.

'I'll die if I get hit.'

To be honest, I had people who could back me up, but that didn't mean I wasn't scared. When the fear of death got too strong for me to bear, I instantly turned my head and looked for the bitch I could rely on, but Xiaolin wasn't there. I cursed, but I had to make use of my contract, and Jung Ha-Yan was about to cast her spell again. However, my fingers stopped moving when I saw Xiaolin standing before us. And she stopped Valentin's attack with her whip wrapped around her hand.

'Y-You're the best, Xiaolin!'

I heard another roar and their voices.

"What are you doing? Are you trying to kill them? Didn't I tell you they were my guests?" Xiaolin asked.

"Let go of me…" Valentin ordered.

"What if I don't? You're the one who should back off before I get angry," Xiaolin warned.

"You…"

'These guys are a mess, too… '

No matter how I looked at it, someone had to fix this situation. The wild boar's face turned red from the stimulation, and blocking his attack head-on had to have been too much even for Xiaolin because her arm was trembling. She was a mid-to-long ranged attacker, so I was sure Valentin's attack had been a bit too much for her.

I wanted someone to stop this because I had to go to the bathroom, and thankfully, a normal person from their side interjected. Naturally, they needed someone to control this crazy chap and bitch.

"It'd be wise to stop, Mr. Valentin, Miss Xiaolin. We're in neutral territory."

It was Archmage Jin Cheong, who had been watching everything unfold from the back. The interesting part was that when he said that, the man with anger

management issues and the crazy woman slowly took a few steps back. The Russian's hands were still trembling, but he suppressed his anger by turning the table into dust. Xiaolin also received treatment from her minion.

The dandy man with a pleasant face slowly stood up. While walking toward us, he continued, "If this continues, we'll end up in a bad situation as well. He's the first foreigner to receive the Honorary Cardinal title, and he's also one of the people under the protection of the templars managing the Sacred Democratic Country's Vatican. I don't exactly know who they are, but if Miss Xiaolin didn't stop you, one of them would have done so."

'He's well-informed… '

I had only heard that something like that could happen, but I had never actually tested whether a templar would really jump out to protect me or not. In fact, I had never even seen a templar before, and I had no idea how they would protect me. All I had heard was that they would react to danger.

'It was really dangerous just now, so why didn't they appear?'

I started worrying that maybe they would only appear after I was dead.

"The delegates of the democratic country are still in Laios, and according to continental law, fighting in neutral territory is forbidden. Obviously, killing a member of another country is illegal as well. We want to avoid criticism from the international community, especially during a sensitive time like this. I understand how you're feeling, Mr. Valentin, but she's not the Mercenary Queen."

"…"

"You'll get your chance later, although it would be the most ideal for me if something like that didn't happen. *Ah*, I haven't actually introduced myself, Father Lee Ki-Young. I'm Jin Cheong. I'm one of the Republic's Five Tiger Generals, and I am also serving in the Republic's military. It's a pleasure to meet you," Jin Cheong introduced.

"*Ah!* It's nice to meet you. I've heard a lot about you," I said.

I honestly never heard anything about him, but he nodded quietly as if he knew I would say that.

'His intelligence is at 99.'

He had a pleasant face, but he obviously had a lot on his mind. The intelligence stat didn't necessarily prove that a player was smart, but the mage before me looked *very* smart. His title was Schemer, and his attribute was inaccessible. It was unlikely, but he might have a mythic-ranked attribute or an eye skill similar to what Kasugano Yuno and I possessed. Naturally, I was curious about him.

'His level is high… '

Amidst this somewhat calm atmosphere was a truth I had realized once again, and it was the fact that they were a lot stronger than I previously thought. Xiaolin had simply been defending herself, but she still managed to go up against Cha Hee-Ra for more than thirty minutes. Valentin Alexandro was a walking bomb based on his nature and title. And Jin Cheong, who seemed like a nice person, felt like he was still hiding something despite his amazing stats, which meant…

'Are they stronger than the Eight Seats?'

Of course, the Eight Seats had powerful members like Cha Hee-Ra and Kim Hyun-Sung, but the people before me had stats that exceeded the power of the members in the lower seats. Basically, the archer of Dawan, Park Yeon-Joo, and people like Cheon Kwan-Wi would be no match for them. Obviously, stats, attributes, and the quality of one's arsenal wouldn't define one's strength, but it didn't mean that there wasn't a gap at all.

"*Hm*… I don't know why you're here, but it wouldn't hurt to hear you out. I think we should get to know each other first. *Ah!* Please have a seat. You too, Miss," Jin Cheong suggested.

"Thank you."

I saw them pulling out chairs so that we could sit comfortably, but Jung Ha-Yan frowned as if Jin Cheong's kindness was making her feel uncomfortable. And for some reason, I got the feeling that he was flirting with her.

'Bastard… '

He knew there wasn't another talented player like Jung Ha-Yan. I wasn't sure if he was interested in her as a woman, but regardless, it was undeniable that it made me

feel uncomfortable. However, Jin Cheong looked at me as if he were amused.

"*Hm*… it seems like you haven't eaten yet…" he said.

"You're right," I answered.

"This place takes a long time to serve meals, so how about we play a simple game while we're waiting for the food?" Jin Cheong suggested.

It was an odd suggestion.

'What kind of bullshit is he saying all of a sudden?'

CHAPTER 305
A SIMPLE GAME (1)

"A game?" I asked.

"Yes, it's a simple game. It's like chess, but it's probably a bit more complicated… I'm sure you'll understand it right away, though," Jin Cheong answered.

'Why does this crazy bastard want to play a game all of a sudden?'

I wanted to tell him that I didn't care about any game and to just send us home, but I couldn't say that. The only reason I was safe right now was thanks to this guy in front of me.

'Am I safe for now?'

Since he didn't want to cause trouble in neutral territory, he had to be the kind of person who disliked getting involved in complicated matters. The atmosphere wasn't really uncomfortable, and this guy was controlling both Xiaolin and Valentin. However, I wasn't sure if it were because he was stronger than those two or if there were a different reason, but the answer became obvious when the heavily breathing Russian Park Deok-Gu didn't punch us.

'It's fine.'

When I turned my head and looked at Jung Ha-Yan, I saw that she still looked nervous. I tapped her shoulder lightly, and she seemed to have calmed down a bit. The fact that I almost died just now kept repeating in my mind, which made me lose my appetite. However, I had no choice but to do as he suggested.

"I'll treat you to a meal. *Ah*, before anything else, I should explain the game. Have you ever heard of this kind of game?" Jin Cheong asked.

"No, it's my first time seeing it…" I replied.

It was ridiculous, but one of his minions brought out a large board game. It was

composed of dozens of chess pieces, and the map itself looked as if it were modeled from actual terrains. Forest, ocean, desert, plains, and city walls. The chess pieces were also very diverse. There were a king, knight, mage, priest, and subjects. Moreover, even though it was difficult to describe it, it seemed like it was a more complicated derivative of chess. Supplies had to be given to battle pieces and to move the troops grouped in each class, the necessary resources had to be fulfilled. The troops were also very subdivided, and there were many types of soldiers on this continent, such as archers, infantry, and cavalry.

'Game, my ass… '

The board depicted a small-scale war. Since he advocated the game, it definitely had rules; however, if the basic rules were disregarded, then it would be very similar to an actual war.

'What's he up to?'

He could truly be doing this for entertainment, or he could be doing this to test me. Since he had high expectations, he had probably heard of me. Unfortunately, the majority of the description about me being a genius was fabricated.

'I think I caused a misunderstanding… '

However, I was in a situation where I couldn't refuse…

"The rules are simple. If the king dies, you lose. If all of your pieces die, you lose as well. If you have any questions, or if you need anything, please let me know," Jin Cheong informed.

"Alright…" I replied.

"Additionally, I think it would be best if I gave you a handicap…" he added.

"I won't refuse it. The more you can give me, the better," I replied.

"I'm relieved that you're not offended by my offer," he said.

'Why would I be offended?'

Did he really think I would refuse? I always enjoyed starting with an advantage from

the start, but I only asked for this to buy some time…

'This is my chance.'

When I signaled to Jung Ha-Yan with my eyes, she nodded as if she understood what I wanted.

Since Jin Cheong was part of the Republic's military, I was sure he was knowledgeable in this type of simulation, and even though I wasn't very familiar with chess, it wasn't your usual chess, so I should be able to learn it quickly. At least, that was what I thought a few minutes ago.

'You… you… bastard. You cheating bastard!'

Jin Cheong's troops and supplies were superior from the start, and as the game progressed, the more I grew astonished by it. Even though this was my first time playing this game, he was really skilled at it, and it was ridiculous how he was killing my pieces one by one and driving me into a corner. I had more troops than him, so I wondered how I got cornered like this, and the more I moved the chess pieces, the worse the situation became. From the start, the formation of my troops was a mess, and I became more frustrated when I noticed that he was going easy on me. Jin Cheong looked excited when we had just started, but he started looking more and more annoyed as time went on.

"The empire, no, the genius of the democrats…"

It was amusing to see him mumble. Unfortunately, the description of my genius was just for marketing purposes. When they announced my status as one of the Eight Seats, they spread some ridiculous rumors, so I could understand why the Republic had that kind of information. However, I didn't feel guilty that Jin Cheong had gotten the wrong information.

Whenever he glared at me from time to time, I could tell he was filled with contempt.

'Maybe it's not contempt… '

He didn't look bored, and he wasn't looking down on me. For some reason, he seemed to be in a really bad mood.

'What's wrong with him?'

When we were halfway through the game, I heard an unexpected voice.

“Are you holding back? You don’t have to worry about the others here. As I said, this is just a game, and regardless of the outcome, I have no intention of creating conflict,” Jin Cheong reminded.

‘What kind of bullshit is he talking about?’

“I’d appreciate it if you could be somewhat sincere,” he requested.

‘Okay, so what in the world are you talking about?’

I was already giving my everything into this game, and if I were playing it to entertain him, then I would have chosen to lose when we arrived at a stalemate. That was what you could consider as lobbying, and it was also a way to get close to someone.

‘I’m doing my best, you bastard.’

If I were at least knowledgeable in this game, he couldn’t have cornered me this badly. There was usually a way to cheat in games with rules, and if I were a knowledgeable tactician, then I would have struggled, at the very least. Unfortunately, Lee Ji-Hye was more knowledgeable than me in that field since she had chosen the Leader job. Still, I made sure to know the basics to the point that I was satisfied with my own knowledge.

‘He’s on a different level.’

I was no match for him. About ten more turns passed after his reminder, and I realized that the mood around the crazy bastard had slightly changed.

“I thought I was finally going to have some fun, and I believe that I have been very considerate of you. But you seem like you don't want to compete with me, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Jin Cheong said.

‘What do you mean compete, you crazy bastard… ’

“Maybe you’ll be more excited if we make a bet…” he suggested.

“What kind of bet?” I asked.

"If I win within the next hundred turns, I win, and if I don't, you win. What should we bet? *Ah*, let's bet our fingers. All ten of them. I don't know how it works, but if it's a simple bet, the templars of the Vatican may accept it," Jin Cheong answered.

Obviously, I was about to curse at him because this dirty bastard wasn't really planning on being considerate to a newbie like me. I lifted my head and looked at him, hoping he was joking, but he wasn't looking at me. He was completely focused on the game, and I knew he wanted to bring my true intentions out.

'He's serious.'

Based on his nature, he wasn't the type of person who enjoyed gambling, and I was sure he was thinking that he had already won. I thought maybe he was just being greedy so that he could bring my true intentions out. Unfortunately, there was nothing he could bring out of me. If I had something, I would have shown it to him already.

'You're crazy!'

"Y-You can beat him! Oppa! Don't go easy on him!" Jung Ha-Yan cheered.

'I'm not going easy on him.'

Jung Ha-Yan clenched her fists and cheered for me as if I could win. As a result, the crazy guy in front of me became kind of nervous.

'Shit, I hope someone brings Lee Ji-Hye here.'

No matter how much I thought about it, I thought this kind of place wasn't suitable for someone like me. The crazy bastard who confidently made the remark that he would end the game within a hundred turns continued playing the game. Resistance was impossible, and there was no way I could catch up to this scum with my stupid brain.

'I have to endure… '

I could win as long as I didn't lose. I would lose if the king died, and the same was true if all the chess pieces were annihilated.

Jin Cheong frowned. He saw through what I was about to do and spoke, "Are you

implying that you won't fight me until the end?"

"I don't understand what you're saying," I said.

"I believe I showed you enough kindness, but it feels like you keep looking down on me, Father Lee Ki-Young," he replied.

"I think there has been a misunderstanding. Really," I said.

"…"

The guy I previously thought was normal wore an even deeper frown, and even though I had no idea what happened, it seemed that I had awakened his wrath. If I lost without much effort, then I could lose my life in addition to my fingers. Unfortunately, there was nothing I could do to turn the tables in a game I had been losing since halfway through the match.

This was a turn-based game. The space was limited, but when he moved one space forward, I moved one space back. If I just focused on enduring and lasting as long as possible, then I should be able to endure a hundred turns.

'Saving the king is my priority… '

I didn't think about anything else. I sent one knight to the vast plains where it was relatively easy to move, and the archers and assassins retreated to the forest. I would use the mages to distract the enemy and the subjects…

'They will be abandoned… '

After gathering as many supplies as the subjects provided each turn, I would use them to either buy time or stop the enemy. Killing the subjects charging toward the main force would make him use a turn. If this happened in real life rather than in a game, I would end up being the scummiest bastard in the world…

'But it's a game, so it doesn't matter.'

To be honest, if a situation like this really happened, there was no guarantee that something like abandoning the subjects wouldn't happen.

I didn't know if he were satisfied, but if that dirty bastard's goal was to know more

about Lee Ki-Young, then he had achieved part of his goal.

'I'm sorry for being such a shitty human being.'

While my excellent subjects were blocking his main force, I started moving the king to the back. If the ordinary soldiers ended up being useless after using them until the very end, then I would let them join the subjects. However, the way Jin Cheong was moving his army one step at a time was suffocating me.

'Are you Zhuge Liang[1] *or something?'*

I could imagine his soldier capturing my king within the next twenty turns.

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1. Zhuge Liang was a Chinese statesman and military strategist ☜

CHAPTER 306
A SIMPLE GAME (2)

Twenty turns. When I thought about where he would move his pieces and the spaces I could escape toward, his troops would reach mine with a few more turns to spare until the 100th turn he had confidently declared. I was certain he was only thinking about capturing my king because he ignored my bait and didn't waste his turn chasing after the troops that ran away.

'Should I have assigned more troops to the king?'

I spread my troops out to avoid annihilation, but the bait didn't work because he knew he wouldn't be able to capture my king within 100 turns if he went after all my troops.

'My fingers… '

I could probably stick them back, but I didn't like the pain.

A part of me wanted to punch that crazy bastard, and naturally, I considered doing it.

I endured it as much as I could, but there was nowhere else I could retreat to, and his troops were closing in from all directions. There was a limit to how far back the king could be moved, and the majority of the subjects had already died as well.

I tapped the table with my finger, and he glanced at me. He was definitely still angry because he stared at me quietly and was probably thinking that I still didn't consider him a worthy opponent.

The food served a while ago was getting cold, and the people watching our game were staring at me quietly. I was sure the people who knew how to read this board were calculating the turns.

'Shit… '

I had no other choice, so I continued playing. I raised the corner of my mouth slightly

as if I were telling Jin Cheong that everything was going according to plan. My smile only lasted for a moment, but the spectators looked kind of puzzled. They were probably curious about why I made that kind of expression considering my situation, but it was obviously just an act. I was just bluffing. I was just pretending to be relaxed. The sudden smile I showed after maintaining a poker face caused Jin Cheong to look at me, and he reacted as if my smile excited him. I didn't even say anything, but I had planted an idea in his head that my next move would be different.

'Different, my ass.'

Military strategy wasn't my area of expertise, and I was embarrassed to say this, but my expertise was in instigation, fabrication, scamming, and tricks. And…

'Psychological warfare.'

In a game where you had to play face-to-face, tricks like those could work. When I snapped my fingers, a small dragon arm started forming on the table with a crackle, and the spectators were surprised at what I had done. It was understandable. It wasn't a useful skill, but I had never seen anyone who wasn't surprised to see a dragon being manifested.

After the product I had created with my alchemy dealt with Jin Cheong's troops, the king and the main force that moved with the king slowly started moving. During all of this, I kept smiling as if I were telling him that he had fallen into my trap. I also became obnoxious to annoy him.

The previously spread out soldiers targeted the heart of Jin Cheong's troops, and the knights that had bought time in the vast plains started to return. However, this was a bad and pointless move.

'Work. Please… work.'

If he had been overestimating me, this should work.

The soldiers I had spread out and the members of the main force accompanying the king could resist, and it was the same thing for the supplies. I didn't have a lot of supplies, but I could intercept the supplies being handed over to Jin Cheong's king. I didn't have any more subjects, so producing supplies was impossible.

'But I can move the soldiers' supplies to the knights.'

Obviously, the soldiers would die in isolation, but the sword of the knights could reach the opponent's king. I wasn't planning on counterattacking, but I had no choice but to hope that this pointless move of mine would be a game-changing move that would confuse him.

All of a sudden, Jin Cheong looked at me quietly.

'Did it work?'

He seemed like he was trying to figure out how I had come up with that move, and it was an amusing sight. I had no idea what my next move should be, but the pause gave me some time to think, at the very least. And since excessive bluffing could lead to suspicion, I decided to bluff in moderation.

I crossed my legs and stared at him as if I were telling him to figure out my plan and to make his move. In response, Jin Cheong started looking at the board as if he were trying to figure out if I had truly made the right move.

There was no talking. Actually, talking wasn't necessary.

I had no choice but to wait for the interpretation of the spectators from the Republic who came with him. As expected, I could hear them talking.

I didn't think that he had lost his judgment, but the whispers of the people around him had definitely shaken him up a bit. Jin Cheong's eyes became filled with both suspicion and determination. I figured that one side of him was probably telling him to be careful while the other side was telling him that my move didn't matter and that he just had to push forward. I couldn't help but hope that the side telling him to wait it out would win the battle in his mind.

Then, he grabbed a chess piece. I watched the board nervously, and he…

'Nice!'

Jin Cheong decided to wait.

'Pffft.'

Even if he lost a turn, my loss was inevitable, but it wouldn't feel like a total defeat. I wasn't sure if he had really fallen for it, but it was undeniable that he had done

exactly what I wanted him to do.

I grabbed a chess piece with my dragon arm on the table, and Jin Cheong looked like he was looking forward to my next move. Obviously, I didn't have anything to show him. After all, it had simply been a show to buy some time. However, he really seemed like he was thinking I had something up my sleeves.

'Idiot.'

When this game ended, he could reflect on this war. By then, he would realize that my move just now was a pointless one.

I raised a chess piece once again.

Boom!

The door and the entrance itself were suddenly demolished. When I looked over, I saw a person I was really happy to see.

"Hee-Ra noona?"

An angel who would protect my fingers descended.

'Shiiit! You're the best, Cha Hee-Ra!'

I told myself that no matter what, I would use these fingers she had saved for her.

Obviously, she wasn't the only one who arrived. She came with Park Deok-Gu, Han Sora, the Red Mercenary Guild members, and…

'Kaaasuuugaaano Yunooo!'

Kasugano Yuno was desperately looking for me with her eyes closed, and it was my first time being so happy to see her.

"What…"

For a moment, Jin Cheong was at a loss for words. The Russian Park Deok-Gu, who would always lose it whenever the Mercenary Queen was mentioned, charged at Cha Hee-Ra. There was a loud *boom,* and the Korean Park Deok-Gu went flying, but he

stood back up and charged at the Russian version of himself.

“You pest… I’ll kill you,” Valentin said.

“Hey, don’t you think your greeting is a bit—*cough*, rude?” Park Deok-Gu commented.

The sudden situation caused Xiaolin to take out her whip, and the other Republic weaklings prepared to fight as well. To them, my saviors definitely looked intimidating.

Jin Cheong stood up and spoke to the Russian Park Deok-Gu.

“Valentin Alexandro. I told you that I didn’t want to cause trouble.”

“…”

“It has been a while, Miss Cha Hee-Ra and Miss Kasugano Yuno,” he greeted.

“I didn’t come here because I wanted to be greeted by you, you little rat. I came here to get someone,” Cha Hee-Ra remarked.

“*Ah*, there seems to be a misunderstanding. We didn’t persecute Mr. Lee Ki-Young of the Eight Seats… It was him who actually came to us—”

“Shut up if you don’t want to see me lose it… The only reason I’m not attacking is that I’m indebted to my darling and that crazy whip girl over there,” Cha Hee-Ra interrupted.

A small smile appeared on Jin Cheong’s face as he looked at Xiaolin. Xiaolin relaxed her arms as she spoke, “I helped him stop that rampaging gorilla at Castle Rock. I’m sure she’s referring to that.”

“You’re right. Anyway, whatever the reason, the event is over. *Ah*, Valentin, you haven’t changed. How have you been?” Cha Hee-Ra asked.

“You slut…” Valentin commented.

They were fighting like cats and dogs.

And I finally realized that aside from the denizens of the Republic and the denizens

of the Sacred Democratic Country, the foreigners from the two regions did not get along as well, which was great news to me.

If a problem occurred, it was likely that Jung Ha-Yan and I would be the first ones to get involved. According to continental law, causing trouble in a neutral zone was prohibited. Jin Cheong didn't want to cause any conflict, just like me. I couldn't say which side was stronger, but a squad with Cha Hee-Ra, Kasugano Yuno, and Jung Ha-Yan wasn't weak at all. Even though that bastard's attribute was still unknown, if both sides ended up fighting, casualties were inevitable.

Anyway, getting rid of this hostile atmosphere was a priority.

"Excuse me, but I think it would be best if we stop here, Mr. Jin Cheong," I suggested.

"*Ah*…"

He was definitely disappointed that he wouldn't get to see my next move.

I stood up confidently. No one stopped me because Jin Cheong shook my hand. He didn't want to cause any trouble, so he decided to end things here. When we shook hands and created a friendly atmosphere, Cha Hee-Ra noona seemed to have slightly relaxed.

I thought it would be okay to tease Jin Cheong a bit more, so I spoke, "If we continued, I would have won."

Obviously, it was bullshit…

"It would have been fun," Jin Cheong commented.

He then stared at the board.

"I'll contact you later, Miss Xiaolin," I informed her.

"I'll definitely go crazy if you don't. I'm not going to see you out because of that red gorilla, so you be careful on your way back," Xiaolin responded.

Of course, I would make time for Xiaolin. Back then, I was busy with internal tasks, but now, I had the leeway to take interest in the Republic. I had a lot of basic information I had to acquire, like the kind of person Jin Cheong was and the

identities of the remaining members of the Republic's Five Tiger Generals.

While I was saying goodbye to Xiaolin, Jung Ha-Yan was talking to Jin Cheong, and I saw her receiving a note from him. It was then that I realized that the interest he showed in Jung Ha-Yan from the start was sincere.

'I really don't like that bastard.'

I found it annoying whenever someone was trying to take what was mine, and when I glanced over at Jung Ha-Yan, I saw her running toward me with a surprised look. Jin Cheong revealed a serious look for a moment because he was trying to say goodbye to her, but she ran away. Jung Ha-Yan grabbed my arm tightly, and I whispered to her because I had to know whether she did what I had asked her to do or not.

"Did you record it?"

"Y-You're talking about that war game, right?" she asked.

"That's right. I'm going to analyze it when we return home. Send that video to Lee Ji-Hye as well, and I'm sure you're tired, but I want you to stay up with me. You're okay with that, right?" I asked.

"Y-Yes! O-Of course. I'm fine with that," she answered.

"*Ah*, also, I don't really like it when you talk to someone like him. Do you understand what I'm saying?" I questioned.

She was not allowed to do it, but I was…

I was the typical, hypocritical piece of shit.

Jung Ha-Yan definitely noticed I was scolding her because her face turned pale. The innocent Jung Ha-Yan was definitely thinking that she had cheated on me.

CHAPTER 307
JUNG HA-YAN INSTRUCTION MANUAL (1)

'How annoying.'

I wasn't the one who neglected her, but it was true that I felt kind of relieved. Still, no matter what I did, I was certain she would support me, and that certainty still existed.

'I forgot about Jung Ha-Yan's worth.'

She was the genius mage Kim Hyun-Sung had paid close attention to since the tutorial dungeon. Moreover, if we were to consider the fact that she knew how to think outside the box, it would be difficult to describe her importance. Even Lee Ki-Young in the Dark World knew at least that much, even though he didn't know the details.

'A genius.'

It wasn't enough to say that her talent was a gift from the heavens. Even players with legendary rank or above magic stats couldn't grow or earn experience as fast as her. Out of the talented mages, Jung Ha-Yan's growth was overwhelmingly fast and strong. She was someone necessary for us to escape the threat of the future Kim Hyun-Sung was aware of. Since she was solely using her talent to catch up with Kim Hyun-Sung's growth speed, it was only right to say that she truly knew how to think out of the box.

It was just my assumption, but Jung Ha-Yan was a mage we really needed for the future and those who didn't know that wanted her for her skills. It was understandable for the opposing group to take interest in her, and it wouldn't be a problem if she simply looked strong. However, anyone could tell that she was mentally unstable and dealing with a problematic person like her wouldn't be easy. As such, it was an issue. If I were in the other group, I could guarantee that I would have done whatever it took to get information about her.

Since the bastard had taken an interest in Jung Ha-Yan, it proved that he had similar

thoughts as me. He was a mage as well, so he was probably looking forward to seeing how strong she was, and if he got lucky, he could even bring her to his group.

'That's never going to happen… '

No person would want their fruits of labor to be stolen. There were many times when I thought it would be good to maintain some distance between her and me because her affection was becoming too much for me. However, the thought of someone taking our precious archmage away made me develop a love that wasn't there before.

'This isn't good.'

On one hand, I was sad that Jin Cheong was interested in Jung Ha-Yan. If he were interested in someone else, I could have allowed him to take them just so they could get information from him.

Anyway, Jung Ha-Yan was shocked when I finished talking. The innocent girl who didn't know how to play hard to get looked as if she were worried that I would dislike her because of this incident.

"I-I-It's nothing like that. It really isn't! He just started talking to me first… I-I…" Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"…"

"I-I'm not that kind of woman!" she suddenly shouted.

I wasn't sure what Jung Ha-Yan meant when she said she wasn't *that kind* of woman, but if my assumption were correct, then *I* was that kind of man.

It was amusing how she stuck next to me in shock. I thought it would be fine to act a little colder, so when I slowly looked away, I noticed her ripping something. I confirmed it was the note she received from Jin Cheong. As if that weren't enough, she used magic to burn it and even stomped the pieces that fell on the floor. She acted as if it were a dirty item. The funny part was that Jin Cheong saw this happen, and as expected, he frowned. Regardless of his intentions, I felt better when I saw him react that way.

'I already called dibs on her.'

During all of this, Jung Ha-Yan cried while desperately defending herself. I made that comment without much thought, so I was kind of shocked when she reacted this dramatically.

"*Heuk.* I-I'm not that kind of woman. Really. *Hiccup*. I'm not cheating on you. I'm really not…" Jung Ha-Yan cried.

The bastard who created this misunderstanding was definitely disappointed by this situation because he glared at me, which got me even more excited. However, if I made this even worse, I might start feeling really bad, so I had to extend my hand out toward her.

When I looked ahead, I saw my lovely saviors waiting for us.

"I know, Ha-Yan. I didn't mean anything by it, so don't worry too much," I assured her.

"I-I'm really not. *Heuk*… Really…" she repeated.

"I know, I know. I said it without thinking," I told her.

Naturally, I decided to wrap this up, but despite telling her repeatedly that I was fine, she was panting for air. Jung Ha-Yan also kept on staring at Jin Cheong with resentment, but to be honest, this was the last time we would have any business with him.

The members of the Republic seemed like they were still wary of us, and it was probably because Hee-Ra noona was glaring at them with her scary eyes.

When I stepped over to the Democrat's side from the Republic's side, Park Deok-Gu welcomed me. Maybe it was because he blocked his Russian doppelganger with his own body, but he looked like he was in bad shape, but still…

'At least he's still standing… '

Park Deok-Gu was sent flying, but he had grown so strong he could block at least one of Valentin's attacks.

"Are you hurt anywhere?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"No, I'm fine, Deok-Gu. I think we should take care of your body more than mine.

That attack just now…" I suggested.

"I think my stomach is a bit messed up, but it's not a big problem. The priests treated me, so I can endure it. More importantly—" he paused.

"Why were you here, darling?" Cha Hee-Ra asked in his place.

She definitely disliked the fact that I created this dangerous situation because she looked kind of annoyed. Cha Hee-Ra had to be thinking that I came here of my own free will, and if I were her, I wouldn't have believed it if someone told me they came here by sheer coincidence.

"It was really a coincidence. I did have a reason for coming here, but it's a long story… Anyway, thanks, noona. I was actually getting kind of worried," I replied.

"If this weren't a neutral territory, you would have died. Even though your second girlfriend was with you, it's not good to just walk around. Do you understand?"

"Yeah…"

The Republic and the Democrats had just concluded a small dispute, but I had never imagined that the foreigners' resentment against each other was this deep. It felt like they disliked each other so much that being foreigners wouldn't be enough reason to unite them, and if they had fought each other on the battlefield a few times as well, it was understandable for them to think even more in that way. Even though there wasn't anything going on right now, it would be difficult for them to get along when they had always been fighting each other.

'The people who recently joined probably won't understand… '

Even Kasugano Yuno looked annoyed, but when I smiled at her quietly, it seemed like she felt better.

Anyway, Cha Hee-Ra walked while looking at the members of the Republic, and she still looked annoyed. Moreover, Jung Ha-Yan was still depressed, so our way back home was quite gloomy.

'It'll get busy… '

During all of this, the only thing I could think of was the work I had to do. Since the

issue with the Republic had surfaced, I had to gather information and see whether they really were our enemies or not.

* * *

'Please. I hope nothing happens... Please... '

I[1] didn't like coming here because every day, it would feel like I was walking on eggshells. I had a bad feeling from the start, but that feeling was reinforced when I saw the situation just now. Traveling with Instructor Lee Ki-Young; no, Sub Guild Master Lee Ki-Young was so burdensome it would always make me tremble. I had this urge to pee just from the thought of the possibility that the previous incident might happen again.

When I glanced over, I saw Miss Jung Ha-Yan maintaining her serious face these past few days. The experience I had built up until now helped me understand very well that she was on the verge of blowing up. Just glancing at her tickled my bladder, so I had to turn my attention to the person I felt the safest with because he was the only person who could protect me if something happened.

"Is there something on my face?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"No…" I answered.

"By the way, how's the task hyung-nim asked you to do…"

"There aren't any problems. Empress Pristina is still stern, but the sub guild master seemed like he knew that this would take a long time, so he ordered me to move inconspicuously," I replied.

"*Ah*, I see. I knew there was a reason why he brought you here. I noticed it the moment he suggested that one of the junior members should participate in the task. However, I think he wants to give you some admin duties as well. Don't you agree, noonim?" he asked.

"*Ah*, yes," Jung Ha-Yan answered.

Even Mr. Park Deok-Gu was trying to be careful around her. They were both worried for different reasons. However, Miss Jung Ha-Yan was not only openly expressing that she was in a bad mood, but she was even crying while eating, so it was

understandable for Park Deok-Gu to feel uneasy. The air felt like we were in a funeral home. After thinking about the perpetrator of all these, one side of me started to feel resentment.

'Please… please… '

It was the same even now. Miss Jung Ha-Yan's eyes were filled with tears despite the fact that it was morning, but I didn't pity her. I was actually scared of her because I recalled my first encounter with her.

"Hey, n-noonim. Don't worry too much," Park Deok-Gu comforted.

"*Heuk…* I-I'm really not that kind of woman… *Heuk*…" Jung Ha-Yan cried.

"H-Hyung-nim just said that without thinking. I-It has nothing to do with you. The only reason he can't spend time with you right now is that he's busy. Yeah, that's right…" he explained.

"B-But…"

"Even Sora here hasn't seen him in a while, and the Mercenary Queen, as well as that shaman, hasn't dined with hyung-nim for quite a while now, too. Since he came all the way here, don't you think he would want to find out more about the Republic? I'm sure that it's not because of your mistake that hyung-nim hasn't been here recently," he continued.

"B-Before, he would hug me at least once no matter how busy he was… But after that day—" she paused.

"It's all a misunderstanding. To be honest, I don't think he has any other reasons. I actually think he's being more considerate of you… I think you're overthinking this, noonim," he added.

"But… *Heuk…"* Jung Ha-Yan hiccuped.

I was hoping Mr. Park Deok-Gu's assumption was right because I would finally be able to sleep comfortably by then. Unfortunately, I already knew that this issue wouldn't be resolved that easily.

"*Keugh…* It's all because of him. O-Oppa said he would take me out on a date again.

Ugh… A-After that day, he hasn't said anything… Our date was canceled," Jung Ha-Yan complained.

"It's really not because of you, noonim," Park Deok-Gu repeated.

"I'm really not that kind of woman… *Heuk*. H-He created the misunderstanding…"

"It seemed that way…" Park Deok-Gu agreed.

"…"

I noticed the light in Jung Ha-Yan's eyes turning strange, and I was suddenly reminded of what I went through a long time ago.

'Please don't do this. Please, please let me live in peace.'

I wasn't sure what Miss Jung Ha-Yan was thinking, but her face was becoming grim.

'Please. Please… restrain yourself.'

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1. Han Sora's POV ☜

CHAPTER 308
JUNG HA-YAN INSTRUCTION MANUAL (2)

'What should I do?'

My legs started shaking before I[1] realized it.

'S-Should I run… '

It seemed like Mr. Deok-Gu hadn't noticed the strange atmosphere just yet, but as someone who had seen that look before, I knew very well what that meant. Something was off about their conversation because Miss Jung Ha-Yan kept mumbling, which was scaring me. I wasn't sure what was going on, but she seemed like she was focused on something.

Sub Guild Master Lee Ki-Young was actually busy. He was really busy because of the issue with the neutral nation, and with the Republic getting involved, he had to come up with a different plan. He was so busy that he even gave me a few tasks, but the problem was Jung Ha-Yan, who seemed to have accepted all these.

'What in the world did he tell her… '

While going out to meet with the sub guild master, she didn't go out with us, so I didn't know what happened or what she heard, but based on her expression, Jung Ha-Yan had definitely been scolded for cheating on him.

'He's such a hypocrite.'

All of Lindel, the Sacred Democratic Country and the heavens knew that the sub guild master's relationship with women was complicated, so I wondered how he could say something like that straight to her face. Calling him shameless wouldn't be enough.

'It's all because of that man.'

Their date was suddenly canceled, and when their time together decreased

tremendously, it felt like she was putting all the blame on one of the Republic's Five Tiger Generals. Of course, this was just an assumption of mine. However, I had to pray that she wouldn't cause any issues while she was in the process of becoming aware of her feelings, which caused me to become sensitive to her every move.

I wanted to stand up, but my legs wouldn't move. Surprisingly, Mr. Deok-Gu left first.

"*Ah*, it's time for my training. Noonim, I'm going to head out… *Ahem*. I'll maybe see you tonight… *Ahem*."

'T-That's it?'

I didn't know the details, but he definitely believed this was out of his hands.

'I trusted him… '

I wanted to get up and leave, but my legs and body started to quiver like leaves from a tree. I bit my lips as cold sweat rolled down my body, and I tried my best to look away.

"W-What should I do?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"W-W-What?" I stuttered.

"What should I do… What if oppa continues to hate me?" she continued.

I couldn't tell if she was talking to me or if she was talking to herself.

"So…"

I experienced a similar situation before, but regardless of the answer, I had to get out of here right now. The moment I slapped my legs and moved my body, I felt someone grabbing my hand.

"*Kyahhh!*"

I screamed as I felt my heart drop, but the surroundings remained quiet.

"W-What do you think, Miss Sora? What do you think I should do?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

'Don't ask me… '

"*Heuk*… I don't want oppa to hate me… I-I'm sure he thinks I-I sleep with different men… *Heuk*," she added.

'He's the one doing that, not you!'

I had no choice but to stop myself from saying that because I didn't know what would happen if I told her that. I tried to be as courageous as possible, so when I turned my head, I noticed a woman wiping her tears anxiously. I shouldn't be thinking this, but I started pitying her. I felt bitter because she was showing exactly what would happen when a woman met a bad guy.

'I should comfort her.'

"As Deok-Gu oppa said, everything will be fine. I'm sure he doesn't think that way. I think… he said it without thinking, and he's actually really… busy," I told her.

"T-The gaze in his eyes seems different from usual. *Heuk*. He looks like he really doesn't like me…" she said.

"I'm sure you're misunderstanding it. W-When I was with him, he talked about you a lot. He said you were nice and that he loved… you every time," I informed her.

"Really? H-Have you talked to oppa before?" she asked.

"Of… course! Of course, it wasn't just the two of us! Mr. Deok-Gu was with us, too! That's right. We definitely weren't alone together. *Hahaha*… D-Definitely not," I stuttered.

"*Ahhh*, I see," she commented.

"And whether he said it without thinking or not, isn't it actually good that h-he said something like that?" I asked.

"W-What's good about it?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

It hadn't been that long since we talked, but my body was already quivering out of nervousness. It was all because I knew that if messed up, it would be the end of me.

'That was dangerous.'

Telling her that I had been talking to Sub Guild master Lee Ki-Young could cause a misunderstanding.

"What exactly did the sub guild master tell you?" I questioned.

"That he didn't like me—*Hiccup!* Talking to someone like him," she replied.

"That's a good thing!" I shouted.

"What's good about that…"

'Don't glare at me… please, please… '

"It means… he's jealous," I answered.

"Jealous?" she repeated.

"That's right. Sub Guild Master Lee Ki-Young doesn't like seeing you talking to other men. I'm sure of it. If he didn't like you, he wouldn't have cared about what you did with that man. The fact that he said that means he's being possessive. It's actually a good thing," I explained.

"I-Is that true?! Being possessive?" she asked.

"Yes, of course," I answered.

"Oppa was being jealous?"

"I'm not sure since I wasn't there…" I pointed out.

"Oppa was being jealous…" she mumbled.

"That's right," I commented.

"Oppa was being jealous!" she shouted.

"Yes!" I yelled.

“He’s being possessive over me!” she shouted again.

“Yes, that’s it!” I said in agreement.

I thought about whether I was saying the right things or not, but I couldn’t find the answer. Right now, I was trying to make her stop crying. I was worried because she seemed really happy, but seeing Jung Ha-Yan’s happy face made it more comfortable for me to breathe.

‘Did I say the right thing?’

The issue was this unknown anxiousness growing on one side of my heart.

‘If… ’

If she tried to recreate a similar situation after realizing that the sub guild master was just jealous, he might actually start disliking her. And if she started crying again because of that, she might blame me for it.

‘It’s because of you, Miss S-S-Sora. It’s because of you! Hiccup… I really don’t want to do this, but… it’s all your fault!’

When I imagined Jung Ha-Yan stabbing me with a dagger while saying that, I started thinking that maybe I shouldn’t have done this. My words could lead me to hell, but at the least, I wanted to avoid the blame because she might actually kill me. I survived last time because I got really lucky. Actually, I would rather die than experience that again.

I was actually starting to become happy again recently.

“A-And…” I started.

“What?” Jung Ha-Yan questioned.

“And that person… I’m sure he has bad intentions. Yes, that’s right. Since the sub guild master is good at reading people, he probably caught on to the fact that the man had something else in mind. He didn’t mind it when you previously spoke to other men, right? I’m sure that man had other plans and that’s why Sub Guild Master was annoyed,” I added.

"*Ah*... I-I see," Jung Ha-Yan muttered.

"Of course, everything I'm saying may not be the answer, but it's most likely what he is feeling. Rather than saying that it's because of you—" I paused.

"I-It's because of that bad man, right?" she asked.

"Yes…"

"What should I do?" she asked.

"About what?" I questioned.

"I need to prove to oppa that he's the only one for me and that I don't have any interest in a bad man like that man," she answered.

"Is there really a need—"

"Oppa needs to know that I'm not that type of woman. Yes, he has to know," Jung Ha-Yan interrupted.

"Don't you think… he already knows?" I asked.

"But he needs to know better. Being jealous and possessive is fine, but… I don't like oppa looking at me like that. That's because… he's the only one for me. I need to prove my innocence and show him that it's the bad man's fault," she explained.

It felt like the atmosphere was getting heavier.

"Yes, it's not your fault, Miss Jung… Ha-Yan," I mumbled.

"It's that bad man's fault, right?" she questioned.

"If we have to put the fault on someone… then it could be the bad man's fault…" I said.

"I was only interested in oppa, but he started talking to me, which caused a misunderstanding with oppa. He thinks I'm a strange woman, so of course, it's that man's fault. If it weren't for him, this wouldn't have happened. It's his fault that our date got ruined… Our date was actually going really well… We could have eaten

together and o-officially become one! Yeah… we got interrupted," Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

"Well… that's…"

"We got interrupted. Yes… and as if that weren't enough, he wasted our time on something stupid. Think about it. Back then, we were in danger. My precious oppa could have died because of them. Those useless people are dangerous as well," she continued.

'T-This isn't good.'

It was scary how she kept on mumbling to herself, and I kept recalling that horrific moment, which made me feel sick. I was sure that not even a mouse would feel this scared in front of a cat.

"It wasn't just him. That woman seemed like she liked oppa as well and that big man even punched oppa. Think about it. It's because of them that oppa became busy. If it weren't for them, we could have gone out every day to have fun. W-Why did they come to Laios and put my oppa in an uncomfortable situation? T-They should've just stayed in the Republic! T-Those idiots! D-Dummies! There are still a lot of places I haven't visited and things I haven't done yet… Even Deok-Gu oppa said this trip was my chance! But they ruined it. All of it! They ruined it all!" she yelled.

"P-Please…" I begged.

"I have to get rid of them. I have to kill them," she continued.

"Save me…" I begged again.

"I have to kill them. I'll clean them all up. I should have made sure I was even stronger since they're strong, too…" she mumbled.

"Please… Please save me," I muttered.

In addition to my trembling body, my bottom felt wet and tears unknowingly formed in my eyes as well. I knew Miss Jung Ha-Yan's anger wasn't being targeted at me, but I couldn't help but keep asking someone to save me. The nightmare I experienced before reared its head once again, and it was trying to devour me.

While I was muttering, Miss Jung Ha-Yan's voice died down, and it became really quiet.

'Did she leave?'

Then, I heard someone's voice.

"You agree with me right, Miss Sora?"

I obviously had no choice but to nod.

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1. Han Sora's POV ☜

CHAPTER 309
JUNG HA-YAN INSTRUCTION MANUAL (3)

The fact that the situation had become more complicated was a bad thing. From the start, I knew I had to invest some time, but the situation became more complicated than I thought. Expecting results when a week hadn't even passed since we arrived was the mindset of a thief. Seeing Pristina avoiding my offer and questions made me think that the alliance offer itself was the problem, but…

'It's still early.'

It had only been a week, and since my opponent knew my intentions, it was better to set up in advance rather than going straight in with the offer. I had high expectations for Han Sora, and she was really working hard. I had also been spending most of my time with the influential figures of Laios, so you could say I was building a foundation.

'Those bastards from the Republic are annoying… '

Tasks that shouldn't have made me nervous were making me nervous, and the Republic's existence was the reason behind it. Three of the Eight Seats had moved over to Laios, and the important figures of the Republic visited Laios as well. It would have been a relief if they simply came here as tourists, but obviously, all those people didn't gather here just to go on a trip. They definitely wanted something, and I couldn't help but think that they wanted the same thing as us.

'An alliance with Laios.'

It was similar to a courtesy greeting they made every year, but the greeting seemed grand this time. It was an indicator that the political scene on the continent was becoming unstable, so this task was very important. If Laios and the Republic joined hands, then we would be isolated. Since I had achieved so many things in the Sacred Democratic Country, I didn't want to leave everything behind.

'Of course, I don't want to leave everything behind… '

The leader of the Sacred Democratic Country was serving me, so I didn't want to miss out on the opportunity of an alliance here in Laios. I was busy since there were many important things I had to handle. Thanks to that, my days were getting monotonous.

I started my day greeting Pristina and the influential figures of Laios. It wasn't a big deal, but I met with the foreigners of Laios, and I talked about supplying them with my potions being produced in the Sacred Democratic Country. While offering them a decent and satisfactory contract, I would speak sweet words to them about the benefits they would receive if Laios became our ally. It could be considered as lobbying, but they still hadn't agreed to the contract because the neutral nation didn't like contracts like this. They knew that if they were to accept something, they had to give something in return.

'Their guards are up.'

Laios said they welcomed their guests, but they weren't fond of seeing the Republic and the Sacred Democratic Country as guests. Rather than accepting the benefits laid before them, they wanted to maintain their neutral status, so it was like knocking at a deaf man's door. Despite that, I had no choice but to continue knocking and building a foundation was the best I could do.

I was sure the Republic was in a similar situation, and since the influential figures on both sides were staying in Laios, they couldn't carry out any extreme diplomatic strategies. Despite the fact that we couldn't see each other's offers or plans, we knew what was going on.

Originally, I wanted to focus on my conversation with Laios while pretending to be on vacation, but because I got involved in a complicated situation, I had no choice but to skip all my plans with Jung Ha-Yan and Cha Hee-Ra.

In addition to sending information about my encounter with Jin Cheong, I also ordered Max to analyze Jin Cheong's patterns and habits. Since my brain couldn't keep up with Jin Cheong, I had to find other ways to keep up.

[I think it'll be difficult with my skills. I'm sure you felt it as well, but it felt like he was playing fair at first… I don't think I can use any data either… However, this is better than nothing, so I'll keep running simulations for now. I'm honestly not confident, though.]

This was Lee Ji-Hye's reaction after watching the video we sent. What she said despite being a skilled strategist made me nervous. This was kind of different from the ongoing Laios recruitment war between us. This was about the danger we could expose ourselves to if Jin Cheong's group became our enemies.

We had already confirmed that the Republic's Five Tiger Generals or whatever were strong, but when I saw them, they were more powerful than I thought. It felt like the Korean Park Deok-Gu and Cha Hee-Ra combined could deal with the Russian Park Deok-Gu, and Xiaolin herself was just a powerful person. It was the same for Jin Cheong. It couldn't be said that he was just a smart person since his magic stats were high, and he was also physically strong enough that he deserved to be called a magic swordsman. If war broke out, he would probably stand in the back giving orders, but personally, it was kind of shocking to hear that they were stronger than the lower-ranking members of the Eight Seats. If the levels of the remaining two fell short…

"They're stronger," Xiaolin said.

"*Huh*?"

"I told you they're stronger than me. The public doesn't know about it, but nothing will change even if the public knew about it. To be exact, I'm at the bottom of the rankings among the Five Generals. Actually, you can say I'm similar to Valentin. But since you can't judge a person's strength on their stats alone, and since I have never fought against him before, I'm just guessing," she explained.

"*Hm*…"

"I'm excluding Mr. Soldier. He's second in rank, but it's difficult to measure his power since he's a mage. However, I'm pretty sure our number one is really strong. You'll be surprised when you see him. By the way… don't you think you're being too obvious?" she questioned.

"I don't understand what you're saying, Miss Xiaolin," I replied.

"Yeah, right… I understand that you're trying to get information, but you're being too obvious about it by asking questions related to the generals," she explained.

"It's a misunderstanding. If you have any questions, feel free to ask. It's more meaningful if we exchange information rather than me extracting information from you," I told her.

"This isn't the type of information that I want, though. When a man and a woman meet, the woman obviously wouldn't want to have a serious conversation like this. The woman would want to go to a nice restaurant and eat while drinking wine. You owe me a lot, so I suggest that you should be a bit considerate of my feelings…" she suggested.

"Of course, I'm very grateful for the help you provided to me last time. However, there's currently an issue between us, and it has only been a few days since we started meeting. Anyway, *ahem*, it's your turn, Miss Xiaolin," I explained.

"What do you think about me?" she asked.

As a whole, it had already been decided that I would spend time with Xiaolin like this and even though we had *exchanged* information, I still had a debt to pay.

'She's bold.'

I wasn't sure if it was because she still hadn't fully matured, but she was more reckless than I thought. However, Xiaolin's actions were understandable. She was 22 years old when I first saw her, and it probably took her a long time to get to where she was today, so she most likely started training in her mid to late teens. Since her talent was different from others, she was probably nurtured with high expectations, and she surely received elite training. She was also beautiful and charming appearance-wise, and she was definitely different from the women I had seen so far. I said something similar before, but she was more erotic than sexy. She was wicked, similar to the *"exploiter of people"* Princess Charlia, whose face I couldn't remember anymore, but she had this indescribable sexual allure. Xiaolin was wearing a cheongsam with high side slits, and her gaze when she looked at me along with her long eyelashes, fingers, reddish face, and even her every move gave off this strong feeling that she was seducing me.

I felt bad for Jung Ha-Yan, but her seduction couldn't be compared to Jung Ha-Yan's periodic seduction. Rather than listening to her cheap information, I wanted to just do it with her and become a bit closer to her, but…

'I'm sure that's a crazy thing to do.'

She was like a venus flytrap. If I came in just because I like her…

'I might die.'

Basically, Xiaolin was the type of person with an external facade. She looked normal right now, but I knew better than anyone else that she was anything but normal. Our first meeting was at the black market, and although she didn't look like it, she had a very cruel nature. Even Kim Hyun-Sung treated her like a villain, so it was obvious what she was like in Kim Hyun-Sung's past life. Spending time with her was no different from wanting to be found as a corpse that had been suffocated to death.

"I think you're beautiful and honestly, I'm interested in you," I confessed.

"That's a relief. What part of me are you interested in?" Xiaolin asked.

"Well, I can't really pinpoint exactly which part of you. *Ah*, what do you think of me, Miss Xiaolin?" I asked.

"That's your next question, right?" she asked.

"Yes, it is," I replied.

"Can I answer honestly?" she asked.

"Of course."

"…"

"…"

"You look really erotic and charming…" she started.

I couldn't help but cough. I was more shocked by the fact that she said that so openly rather than the fact that she had the same thought as me.

"I usually don't feel this way about others, but… it's really strange. You're not exactly my type, but you're keeping me interested, and it feels like my sweet honey is dripping. Do you understand? I think I can smell a sweet scent from your body, and your lips look as if you applied fruit juice to them. I'm sure you didn't use magic…" she described.

"*Ahem*…"

"I don't know if others think of you the same way, but that's how you look in my eyes,

so it's kind of funny," she continued.

I thought Cha Hee-Ra and Jung Ha-Yan didn't think of me the same way Xiaolin did.

"If that's a compliment, thank you," I commented.

"Of course, it's a compliment. My description of you may have been long and superficial, but I'm basically telling you that I'm attracted to you *sexually,*" she added.

The corner of her lips went up, and I wasn't sure if I was seeing things, but it seemed like she was smacking her lips. And that was when a strange nervousness started filling me up…

'What the… '

"*Uh…*"

'What's that?'

There wasn't anything wrong going on with Xiaolin. However, something had gone wrong at a place far from here. I could feel the ground trembling ever so slightly, and I could feel an immense amount of mana from the sky.

'Shit… What is that?'

I saw an enormous clump of mana falling to the outskirts of the city.

CHAPTER 310
JUNG HA-YAN INSTRUCTION MANUAL (4)

I rubbed my eyes once, but I could still see the same sight. I wasn't daydreaming. A large dark red orb was falling from the sky.

"What is that…"

Xiaolin reacted the same way as she mumbled while looking out the window. However, she looked even more shocked than me, and it was obvious why she reacted that way.

'That's… '

The dark red orb was falling to where the people from the Republic were staying.

'That's crazy… '

Booooooooooom!

The large mana orb struck the shield magic protecting the city, and the people dining with us started screaming at the ridiculous sight. With a *crackle,* the basic shield magic protecting the city cracked and the large mana orb was immediately sucked into the crack.

This happened in the blink of an eye, and it was interesting how we didn't get affected.

I wasn't sure what kind of magic it was, but it seemed like a type of magic that targeted a specific location. It wasn't elemental magic. It seemed more like black magic, but I couldn't feel any black magic-like energy. Saying that it simply devoured space was the best description for it. It was a very concentrated clump of mana. Constructing a spell so that it would do something like that was more difficult than increasing a spell's firepower, and that was probably the reason why the shield protecting the city broke in an instant.

'Crazy... This is crazy!'

We were more astounded than the dinosaurs who watched a meteor fall and even though I didn't know what was going on, I thought it would be a good idea to get away from here. I didn't know what the others were thinking, but what we were witnessing was basically an incomprehensible natural disaster.

'Is it really a natural disaster... '

Booooooooooooooom!

It was a sound effect I had never heard before, and the orb that fell to that specific location had completely swallowed the space around it while spinning. There was nothing in it other than a clean cross-section that looked as if it were a stapled piece of paper. To make things worse, smaller red orbs were falling to other locations as well. There wasn't a lot of them, but they were enough to turn the city into hell.

We had to be really lucky because the orbs mostly absorbed inorganic matter, and the orbs only targeted that place and its vicinity.

Boooooooooom!

The unique sound effect that kept on going slowly quietened, and I saw a sight I never knew a magic spell could do.

'How could this happen? Actually, what was that?'

I had long acknowledged the fact that magic was a subject I had a hard time understanding, but I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I could feel mana that was certainly different from nature's mana, and if it weren't for it, I would have thought it wasn't magic but a rare and unusual natural disaster on the continent, similar to a magic storm.

I wasn't the only dumbfounded person. The restaurant had become quiet as if the scream earlier never even happened. However, when a baby started crying, everyone hurriedly ran out, including us.

"We should head out," Xiaolin suggested.

"I'll go with you," I told her.

Xiaolin thought for a moment before nodding because she thought there wouldn't be any issues if I came with her.

When we exited the restaurant, we saw chaos around us. The investigators dispatched by Laios were running around while the monks and ascetics were looking for injured people. The mages definitely reacted quickly, and the fact that they reacted to this a lot sooner than I thought was worthy of praise, but…

'The levels of the mages here are low… '

I couldn't expect them to find out what was going on. Controlling the surrounding area and pretending as if they were doing something was probably their limit.

Amidst the chaos, the denizens were running around, and even Xiaolin's lackeys were doing the same.

It was difficult to figure out how to handle this because I was no different from the denizens. I was worried that a second attack might happen and that was the reason why I was staying close to Xiaolin.

It only took us a moment to arrive at the location where the orb fell.

'Shit… '

What we saw after we arrived was a sight to see.

'Are they all dead?'

I didn't know what happened to the people inside, but I was sure we wouldn't find the corpses of the people who had gotten devoured by that orb.

'I wonder if that bastard and the Russian got devoured as well… '

I had no idea what was going on, but I was honestly hoping that they died. However, I didn't think that my wish came true when I saw some people gathering around. After walking through the crowd, I saw Jin Cheong, the Russian Park Deok-Gu, and a few of their members I had seen a few days ago. Only three of their lackeys survived. I wasn't sure how they managed to survive, but I nodded when I saw one of the Russian Park Deok-Gu's arms twisted in a way I couldn't describe. I was certain he was saved by that bastard.

“Shit… *Cough.* Damn it.”

The Russian Park Deok-Gu kept on coughing while being treated by the priests. They were able to save his arm because he received treatment right away, but it seemed like it would take some time for his body to fully recover. I was amazed that he managed to withstand that attack, but I thought that even he had definitely overused his powers.

Jin Cheong was looking at the neatly cut cross-section while calming the others down. The look on his face seemed like he was analyzing the cross-section.

Even though I wasn’t the one who did all this, I became nervous for some reason. The location where the Republic members happened to be staying received the most damage, so I naturally felt nervous.

“Let me ask you something… is this—”

“I guarantee that the Democratic Country has nothing to do with this incident,” I interrupted Xiaolin.

“…”

“…”

“Really?” she questioned.

“Yes…” I replied.

I swore to God we weren’t behind this…

Xiaolin quietly looked at me before nodding. She definitely understood that I wasn’t dumb enough to do something like this.

The fact that a preemptive strike was made on the Republic within a neutral nation was an extremely serious matter, and the perpetrator could be rebuked by other countries under continental law.

Since we were staying in Laios to establish an alliance with Laios, there was no reason for us to do something like this. It would be nice if they thought the same, but…

'They might use this against us.'

I felt like I had to prepare a countermeasure, so even though we came here together, I quickly spoke up.

"It'll be best if you go talk to them, Miss Xiaolin. I'll have to look into this matter myself…"

"Yes, I think that'll be better before that brute gets worked up again… We will also have to look into this to see what happened, but right now, we have no choice but to be suspicious of you. I hope you understand," Xiaolin informed me.

"Yes, I understand," I replied.

'Understand, my ass… Maybe this was a fabricated scenario.'

It was less likely, but it was still a possibility. The members of the Republic were the ones who died, but this incident would put us in a more complicated position.

"I won't be seeing you out," she said.

"Okay…"

Xiaolin headed toward Jin Cheong and Valentin. It seemed like they were talking about something, but I couldn't hear them. Laios would probably contact the Republic soon, and investigators would be dispatched from the Republic's side. Of course, the Sacred Democratic Country would dispatch their own investigators as well.

The powerless Laios wouldn't be able to stop an armed group of investigators, and in the end, the situation would become even more complicated.

'I'm sure they're shocked as well… '

Unfortunately, it already happened, and we couldn't turn back time.

The Empress of Laios was probably pulling out her hair in frustration.

When I glanced back one more time, I saw people investigating while limiting access to the scene. Looking at it alone, it didn't seem like the Scared Democratic Country

was behind all this, but since this was a serious and sensitive matter, they would surely investigate everyone.

Jung Ha-Yan might know some—

'Shit… '

"Damn it."

I automatically mumbled to myself, and I kept cursing without realizing it. I still hadn't confirmed it, but I started to get suspicious.

'It's probably not her.'

No, it shouldn't be her, and even if *she* were the culprit, Jung Ha-Yan couldn't be the culprit.

'Her motive is uncertain… '

It wasn't actually uncertain because I knew she would cause some kind of trouble when her magic stat reached 99. Cha Hee-Ra had once suppressed her, but it didn't really change the fact that Jung Ha-Yan could go rampant at any moment. Recently, she had been quiet, but I became even more nervous when I realized that. After that incident with the Republic, I hadn't seen her much, and she hadn't been eating properly as well. There were times when we met briefly, but I was sure those meetings weren't enough to maintain Jung Ha-Yan.

The long-awaited date was ruined, and a strange misunderstanding was even made, so if she thought that it was all the Republic's fault, it could be enough reason for her to do something extreme. Of course, that would prove true if there were no one to stop her.

'No, it shouldn't be her. I'm sure it isn't… '

But based on what I knew, there were only a handful of people who could cast that kind of magic. And of course, the first person on my list was Jung Ha-Yan.

I immediately thought that this wasn't the time for me to just stand around, so I ran to the Sacred Democratic Country's house as fast as I could while stopping myself from cursing out loud.

'Shit, shit, shit!'

When I ran as fast as I could, I saw the members standing nearby. The incident was so huge there was no way they would stay inside. The people from Laios had already arrived and were limiting access so that others couldn't get close to the incident's ground zero. The incident happened close to the house where we were staying in, so we told them that we would manage this area for them. We were basically the embassy for foreigners from the Sacred Democratic Country. I wasn't sure who made that call, but they made the perfect decision.

When I walked in while taking off my outer clothes, the members of the Red Mercenary Guild guided me, and the mages with Kasugano Yuno were either tracking the traces of mana or collecting fragments that had fallen.

"You're late, darling. Where were you? Did you see the mana fall?" Cha Hee-Ra asked.

"Yeah. I ran over here because of that. I was taking care of other business. Here…" I replied.

"Wait, let me ask you this first. Did you do this?" Cha Hee-Ra asked.

"No. I don't know anything about this," I answered.

"Are you sure?" she questioned.

"Yeah, I'm really not the one who did this…" I told her.

I didn't know why she was questioning me, but Cha Hee-Ra nodded. She had to be thinking that it was my doing. Cha Hee-Ra was about to say something, but I cut her off because I was the one in a hurry, not her.

"Have you seen Ha-Yan? Noona?" I asked.

"She's over there," she pointed.

I was sure she understood the meaning behind my question because she nodded in response. When I looked at the direction her finger was pointing in, I saw Jung Ha-Yan focused on the investigation with her back turned to me.

'It's not you, right?'

I couldn't help but be suspicious of the fact that Jung Ha-Yan didn't immediately run into my arms. When I called her, she started turning her head with a slightly nervous expression.

'Please… '

CHAPTER 311
JUNG HA-YAN INSTRUCTION MANUAL (5)

"Ha-Yan," I called out.

"*Ah…* O-Oppa, you're here," Jung Ha-Yan answered.

She turned her head quickly and ran toward me. Her expression was the same as always; no, it was kind of different because she looked like an anxious puppy who had to go poop. I saw an unknown sense of guilt, but it lasted only for a moment. Right now, Jung Ha-Yan looked like her usual self.

"Ha-Yan, did you—" I paused.

When I started talking, she closed her mouth. She seemed like she was preparing herself to answer me, and she was definitely worried as well because I saw her take a deep breath. Jung Ha-Yan had no talent for lying, and it was especially noticeable whenever she had to lie to me. If Jung Ha-Yan really were planning on lying, then I would understand why she was preparing herself.

Naturally, I looked around as I was about to ask her because I was worried that she would start her answer with, *"T-To be honest…"*

This was the wrong place to ask her something like that.

"Yes?" she asked.

"No, it's nothing. Let's talk later," I told her.

There were too many people watching, and if Jung Ha-Yan were truly the culprit behind this incident, then it was better if fewer people knew about it. It wasn't that I didn't trust the members of the Red Mercenary and the Yozora Guild, but something unexpected could happen, so I had to be careful. Taking Jung Ha-Yan away right now could seem suspicious, and I started thinking that she might not be the culprit.

'I don't see any signs that she used her mana.'

I could tell just by looking at her. I didn't know just how strong a mage with 99 points in the magic stat could be, but the caster should be exhausted after using a spell like that. But Jung Ha-Yan looked so normal I even thought she might not be the culprit, but…

'She could have used other methods… '

No matter how crazy she was, she wouldn't do something without thinking about the consequences, and if she really were the culprit, I assumed she had a plan after throwing that orb. As such, she had definitely erased any traces and evidence.

To avoid suspicion falling on the Sacred Democratic Country, smaller orbs were thrown at other areas as well, and there had to be some connection between the caster's exhaustion and those orbs.

When I turned my head, I immediately called for Park Deok-Gu.

"Deok-Gu."

"Yes?" he responded.

"Go outside with Ha-Yan," I ordered him.

"Why are you… asking me to do that at a time like this?" he asked.

"I'm sure there are denizens and other people who got caught up in all this. Don't do anything else and just focus on helping with the repair work. Do you understand what I'm saying?" I asked.

"*Ah*…" he commented.

"I'm asking you to help the denizens of the neutral nation using magic. I also think it won't be a bad idea to donate the items we have as relief goods. Anyway, magic is the main part. Help them as much as you can. I'm leaving this task to you," I explained.

"*Ahh! Oh!* So, that's what you meant! As expected from hyung-nim!" he exclaimed.

"What…"

"You're definitely different… Trying to help others in a situation like this. You're a

righteous person indeed! You always seem indifferent, but you're considerate more than other people! The righteous Lee Ki-Young! It even sounds unique," he said.

"Stop talking nonsense and get going," I told him.

"Of course, we have to hurry. Leave it to me! I'll make sure this is handled perfectly," he shouted.

"Take some of the mages from the Yozora Guild as well. And Ha-Yan, let's talk after you have walked around the city," I suggested.

"Okay, Oppa," she answered.

Her calm expression was starting to change from the anxiety, and she looked as if she really needed to pee. When I kept looking into her eyes, she quietly avoided my gaze. When I realized that she hadn't stuttered, I felt like she was more aware than usual.

'You did do it. Shit… '

I became somewhat confident of it when I saw Jung Ha-Yan's face, but I didn't know exactly what she did…

'She's the one that did it.'

It was highly likely that Jung Ha-Yan was the one behind this incident, and even if she weren't the perpetrator, I had to move while thinking that she was the culprit. Naturally, I wanted to send her away from here as soon as possible. People might become suspicious that she was the one who threw that spell, so she had to show people that her mana wasn't exhausted.

Volunteer work was always a plus. If we were lucky, we might make a good impression on Laios, so it was the right decision to send Jung Ha-Yan out right away.

Anyway, Park Deok-Gu, Jung Ha-Yan, and a few mages from the Yozora Guild quickly left because I rushed them and because it hadn't been that long since the incident happened, it was the perfect time for them to go out.

"We're heading out, so be careful, hyung-nim. There's no guarantee that another one of those won't fall," Park Deok-Gu said.

“There’s just a small chance of that happening, so just go. We’re going to start reconstructing the shield magic,” I told him.

“Got it,” he answered.

When I could no longer see Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan, I started moving as well. If Jung Ha-Yan hid the evidence, I had to see it for myself, and even if she didn’t do it, I had to find out where that type of magic came from.

I observed the reactions of the mages from the Sacred Democratic Country who had already arrived. They had just collected samples with Kasugano Yuno. When I approached them, they looked at me as if they were welcoming me.

I wasn’t that knowledgeable when it came to magic, but alchemy came in handy in situations like this. I even had Mind’s Eye, so I would be a lot more helpful than the other mages.

[??? Scattered Magic Crystal - Legendary Rank]

[A crystal influenced by ???’s Semi-Mythic Ranked magic. It can be used as a high-grade catalyst.]

When I started focusing my Mind’s Eye on it, I started seeing different information.

[??? Residual Mana - Legendary Rank]

[Due to the influence of Semi-Mythic Ranked magic ???, it is residual mana floating around and will scatter in seven hours.]

‘Semi-Mythic rank… ’

The magic rank ended up being Semi-Mythic. Basically, it was a type of spell

someone with a magic stat above 99 points could cast.

There were many things I couldn't see with Mind's Eye, and since the eye determined it was a semi-mythic ranked magic, I knew I wouldn't be able to see some of its information. In fact, while the orb was falling, what I saw with Mind's Eye was…

'Nothing.'

I had a lot on my mind, but I immediately opened a flask and gathered the things worth researching. Magic crystal, fragments, and the residual mana were things others couldn't see, so it would be faster if I gathered them on my own. It was a bit surprising that the other mages were picking up useless stones imbued with magic as samples, but even with my eyes, it was actually difficult to tell the difference.

'Nice one.'

It was only possible because the traces had been wholly devoured. When I looked closely at the swallowed section, it was difficult to say that it was cleanly swallowed. In the majority of the places where I saw traces, there were fragments that had fallen off, but other than that, I couldn't see any other traces. Seeing this, I thought it wouldn't be easy to find the location where the spell was channeled, and since the residual mana would disappear in seven hours, it would become even more difficult to find traces.

The interesting part was that these fragments influenced by the spell could be used as catalysts. I still had no idea of their exact uses, but since they were legendary-ranked catalysts, I was sure I could use them in various ways. The magic itself was really interesting as well.

'It looks as if an entire area was swallowed whole.'

When I recalled how Valentin's arm was twisted and deformed rather than severed, he had surely managed to pull his arm out before it could be swallowed. He resisted the force pulling him using his own strength, and even though his arm was broken, he didn't completely lose it. If he had been pulled deep within the orb, or if he couldn't resist it, I was sure that his shoulders or even his entire body would have been severed. Someone dodging too late or being too weak to resist its pulling force would have their entire body sucked into the orb, and they would die without leaving even traces of their blood. They would disappear as if they had never even

existed in the first place.

'No… they didn't disappear… '

When I found a small substance, I came to the conclusion that the people didn't get swallowed up by space. The substance I found was a small stone fragment as big as a grain of dust. I could guarantee that ordinary people wouldn't be able to see it with their own eyes. It was so small it would be difficult to grab the fragment with tweezers that were way smaller than normal tweezers. Moreover, I couldn't see any information about it. In some ways, it was no different from a normal stone, but…

'Something's strange… '

I soon realized what it was…

'That's crazy. They didn't disappear. They got compressed.'

The location the spell had affected and *swallowed* whole actually compressed everything in its range into a small stone fragment.

'Crazy… crazy… shit… '

Anyway, the victims had truly died. However, when I thought about how the victims from the Republic's side got forcibly compressed into this small stone fragment, cold sweat started to form all over my body. This was a type of spell that would instantly compress everything around it into a grain of dust as soon as it exploded. In that instant, the victims' bones and blood were crushed, and they would turn into something similar to nothingness.

It was a shocking revelation, and the fragment became heavy as if I were holding a boulder. The item I was holding contained the ground of the spell's ground zero. I thought about the possibility of compressing one's mana or something similar to it into this form and using it as an energy source, but…

'The thought is really scary… '

At first, I was praying that the culprit wouldn't end up being Jung Ha-Yan, but the more I learned about this magic, the more I hoped that the perpetrator would end up being Jung Ha-Yan, which put me in a conflicting situation.

'An unknown enemy used this kind of magic?'

The level of magic felt like it was a natural disaster, similar to a meteor falling from the sky, and if Jung Ha-Yan really did this, then I could fix it. However, if an unknown enemy were the perpetrator behind this disaster, then I would run fast instead of dealing with it. As always, changing my mind depending on the situation was the wisest thing to do.

'Please let the culprit be Jung Ha-Yan… Please… '

During all of this, the fact that I kept seeing an unfamiliar black smoke coming from this small substance was making me anxious. I didn't notice it at first because it was so small, and there were many different types of residual mana within the fragment. Among them was a residual mana I assumed was black magic, and the sight of it kept bothering me. Naturally, I recalled one person I had been keeping in my mind.

'Where's Han Sora?'

I felt like the puzzle pieces were falling into place.

'Where is she? Shit… '

CHAPTER 312
JUNG HA-YAN INSTRUCTION MANUAL (6)

'Jung Ha-Yan didn't do it by herself.'

It was just a simple assumption, but I couldn't help but think that the spell was too powerful for her to perform alone. She had recently become very careful, but I was sure she wasn't this careful.

It was difficult for me to detect exactly where the mana came from and the flow of mana was different from someone I knew. It felt like it took the caster two or three times to complete this spell. Even if they had enough knowledge regarding magic to do this, I was certain they received outside help.

I immediately turned my attention elsewhere because I was really bothered by the fact that Han Sora wasn't here right now. If the Republic revealed that black magic was involved, we could end up in a dangerous situation. All this would be resolved if we just abandoned Han Sora, but using a developing Black Mage as a scapegoat was a waste.

'No way.'

While I was deep in my thoughts, Kasugano Yuno of Celia was walking toward me.

"Master, no, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. Are you looking for something?" Kasugano Yuno asked.

"Nothing in particular… Have you seen Han Sora from the Blue Guild?" I asked with a nod.

"*Ah*… she should be in her room. I think I heard her say that she wasn't feeling well… Is there a problem? Have you found out something?" she questioned.

"I can't provide the details right now, but I believe I found a clue. I'll leave this place to you, Miss Kasugano. These are the samples I gathered, so you can grab the ones that are similar. Please make sure you take the Magic Crystal. I may find clues or use it for new research," I ordered her.

"*Ah*…"

"I think it's a catalyst that can be used as a high-grade material, but I don't know exactly what it is," I added.

Naturally, I kept the compressed catalyst because I had to see if it would show any other reactions.

"I understand," she said, nodding.

"Miss Cha Hee-Ra will take care of the foreign affairs. If there's an official announcement, I'll make sure you're able to return to our house. If possible, please investigate the traces of the incident that occurred in other areas, and if you think we need it, please gather samples," I continued.

"Alright. Please proceed with what you think is the best," she told me.

"Are you able to track this magic, Miss Kasugano?" I asked.

"I don't know the details, so I'll have to look into it more, but even if I can track it, it'll take me a really long time," she answered.

"What about your eyes…" I pointed out.

"I-I apologize, but I can't see it just because I want to, but it's probably best if you leave Laios soon," Yuno suggested.

"What?" I questioned.

"T-To be honest—" Kasugano Yuno paused for a really long time.

I got frustrated by the pause, so when I encouraged her to talk, she started talking.

"Please continue…"

"When that same magic fell, I saw the city turning into ruins with my own eyes. Of course, it was only for a brief moment, and I don't know the exact time…" she informed.

'What's this about… '

I couldn't help but gulp. The orb that fell sent the city into chaos, but this time, Laios would turn into ruins.

"I thought about whether I should tell you or not…" she mentioned.

'What's there to think about? It's better to tell me no matter what.'

It was kind of suspicious, but after hearing her explanation, I realized why she hesitated in telling me.

"I don't know what kind of result it will bring when I tell you about the future. Unlike the past, the future can change even by the smallest incident. If you're related to the future I had seen, it may have been created because of what I told you."

"Are you saying it's possible the future might happen as planned because I'm already aware of the future?" I asked.

"That's the simple explanation. What I told you just now may be one of the processes that will lead to the future I had seen. Of course, the outcome can be the total opposite of what I had seen. It could potentially become a dangerous situation, so I decided that it would be best to tell you. Since I don't know what's going to happen, I think you should consider the option of leaving Laios," she explained.

"I understand what you're saying," I told her.

I understood her completely. Kasugano Yuno was worried that an incident may occur because she told me about the future just now. Even if an ordinary villager heard this information, the future could change because they would surely warn the others of the danger. I was an influential figure who could influence a lot of people, and I may end up being at the heart of this incident. If I tried to stop the future Kasugano Yuno had seen, it may end up being the catalyst that could put us in that incident even faster.

'This is complicated… '

Since Kasugano Yuno had only seen one part of that future, I definitely had to be careful. After all, she had lived a difficult life in the previous timeline because her tongue had slipped.

"I'll… keep that in mind for now," I said.

“Please move with caution,” Yuno warned.

“By the way, has Laios…”

“They haven’t made any official announcements yet. Miss Cha Hee-Ra officially requested the dispatch of the Sacred Democratic Country’s investigation team just now, and Laios accepted. A second attack might happen, so they’re more worried about the denizens than us. The professionals who came to our delegation said something similar, so if you’d like—”

“No, it’s fine,” I interrupted.

I knew what they would say. They would apologize for the sudden accident, comfort the Republic members preparing for any unforeseen situations, and they would say that they were doing their best to fix the situation. The neutral nation had been experiencing a lot of issues recently, and if I wanted to find a weakness politically, I could definitely find one. The situation was simply *that* sensitive right now, so I was sure they wouldn’t be able to clarify their position right away. I was honestly bothered by what kind of stance Laios would express, but there was an issue that bothered me even more. Kasugano Yuno’s story about Laios suddenly turning into a sea of flames caused my anxiety to start building up.

‘It’s probably Jung Ha-Yan’s doing, right?’

It was most likely because Jung Ha-Yan was the one who caused the incident in her past life. Incidents that would provoke Jung Ha-Ya would keep on occurring, and she would eventually run rampant thanks to her unstable mind, turning Laios into ruins.

This would most likely not happen, but an external attack or a natural disaster could turn Laios into ruins in this lifetime. However, anyone would say that the former was more going likely to happen.

It was a good thing that Kasugano Yuno decided to tell me because her comment made me aware that I had to be careful from now on.

‘I just need to be careful.’

I had to be cautious so that I wouldn’t end up provoking her. I had to take care of her mental health once more, but before that, I needed to find Han Sora.

'Why is this so complicated?'

The situation was as complicated as it could be, but my priority was erasing the traces and taking care of Jung Ha-Yan.

When I walked while having different thoughts, I immediately saw our house. Unlike before when it was peaceful, the Red Mercenary Guild members were restricting the entry of other people to the point that even I had to go through a simple procedure. However, it didn't bother me because inspections were necessary.

After entering the house, I immediately knocked on the door of Han Sora's room. When I didn't hear an answer, I opened the door and saw her sitting quietly on the sofa.

"Miss Sora," I called out.

"*Ah*, Sub Guild Master," Han Sora greeted.

"You know why I came to visit, right?" I asked.

"Not really… Is something wrong?" she asked.

"Don't play dumb," I told her.

"Is it about what happened outside? I heard there was an incident outside. I'm not feeling well today, so I'm sorry for not being able to help you," she said.

She was definitely talented in acting to the point that I thought she was just as talented as Kim Ye-Ri and Ahn Ki-Mo.

'Is she really unaware?'

I couldn't help but think, but there was fear in her eyes, so I knew that wasn't the case. However, she wasn't afraid of me.

'She's afraid of Jung Ha-Yan.'

I was sure Jung Ha-Yan had warned her not to tell anyone about this incident. Han Sora was acting this way for her survival, not to mess with me.

“I don’t have time to play around like this, Miss Han Sora. I know what you’re worried about, but I need you to tell me because I have to understand the situation. If you’re worried about Ha-Yan, then it’s okay. I’ll take care of it from my end,” I assured her.

“I really don’t know what you’re talking about, Gub Guild Master. R-Really…” Han Sora stuttered.

“Please tell me. I don’t have time,” I urged her.

“I really don’t know anything! W-Why are you doing this?” she questioned.

I didn’t know what she was imagining, but her eyes, arms, and legs were shaking. It was like she was telling me with her body to stop asking her questions. We kind of had a bad start, but naturally, I pitied her. However, I wasn’t in the situation to be considerate of her circumstances.

“Please don’t do this. I really don’t know anything,” she repeated.

‘What is she talking about?’

“And I don’t understand what you’re saying,” she added.

“I have to understand the situation to fix it, Miss Sora. I have an idea, and I know you’re related to what happened today,” I said.

“Really…” she said.

When the stalemate continued for a while, I naturally strode toward her, causing Han Sora to look surprised. Seeing that she was curling up as much as she could, it felt like she wanted to hide something. When I grabbed her arm, she looked up at me as if she was asking me not to do this. When I activated a simple spell, there was a *swoosh* sound and her shirt was split in half. What I had been expecting appeared before me. A large black spot was covering her chest.

‘Mana exhaustion.’

It was the perfect evidence. It was so perfect she wouldn’t be able to deny it, but as expected, Han Sora immediately started giving excuses.

“T-This isn’t what you think. It really isn’t!”

She screamed while mumbling as if she was surprised, but the evidence was too clear. Han Sora and Jung Ha-Yan were the ones who caused this incident.

“It’s really a misunderstanding. This is… you see. You’re mistaken,” she added.

“Misunderstanding, my ass,” I commented.

“It’s true. It’s a misunderstanding. R-Really! Please… spare me,” she begged.

“It’s okay,” I told her.

“P-Please spare me,” she begged again.

“Why should I…” I paused.

Han Sora was mumbling as her body kept on trembling, but I realized she wasn’t talking to me. When I unknowingly looked back, I saw Jung Ha-Yan looking at us quietly.

‘Shit… ’

CHAPTER 313
JUNG HA-YAN INSTRUCTION MANUAL (7)

'Shit… '

My mind went blank.

'It's over.'

It became clear why Han Sora kept begging to be spared.

"This is… you see… please…"

Han Sora looked pathetic while she was trembling like leaves and in some ways, she looked determined as well for some reason.

'It had to be now… '

Regardless of the reasons, the situation looked pretty obvious. To Jung Ha-Yan, seeing me and Han Sora with her top ripped wasn't a sight she wanted to see, and although I would probably have to explain that it was a misunderstanding, I didn't think she would accept it. I was even more surprised because she was even more mentally unstable right now.

'She appeared now of all times.'

Jung Ha-Yan knew I was going to visit Han Sora and since she was worried about getting caught, she quickly headed this way.

It didn't make sense that Han Sora and I would enjoy a love affair at a time like this, but if Jung Ha-Yan had common sense, I wouldn't be suffering like this.

Jung Ha-Yan's eyes started quivering, and she had to be expressing her hostility toward Han Sora because she started biting her lips. Naturally, I had to handle this situation.

Tears filled Jung Ha-Yan's eyes, and before I could even say anything, she started running in the other direction. I was about to run after her while calling out her name, but someone grabbed my ankle. When I looked back, I saw Han Sora covered in snot and tears.

'What's wrong with her?'

"Let go please," I told her.

"Don't leave me alone, please… Please don't leave me alone," Han Sora begged.

"Let go!" I ordered.

"Please don't leave me by myself. Please s-save me and talk to her. Tell her that what she saw just now wasn't anything. Please. I beg you. *Cough*. Please…" she pleaded.

"Let go of me first…" I repeated.

"No, I can't. Don't leave me here. Don't leave me by myself. I'll do whatever you tell me to do. Take me with you. Take me with you! Please… *Heung*…" she cried.

Taking Han Sora with me would definitely have a negative effect because it would be like taking the woman I was having an affair with to my wife who had just witnessed me cheating on her. I thought leaving her behind was the best choice, but like a cicada clinging to an old tree, she kept hanging onto my leg, so I couldn't do anything. I wouldn't be able to push this woman off of me with my low Strength stats.

"You must tell her that what happened just now was an accident. T-Tell her that you don't have any interest in me. Please… tell her that you think I'm lower than the stones you see on the streets. *Cough*," she requested.

"Alright, I got it," I said.

"N-N-Nooooo! Don't leave me! Please don't leave me! I'll explain everything you saw earlier, so please don't leave me here. Please… don't leave me alone… *Cough*. Spare me… Spare me! You mean bastard!" she yelled.

Something had to have gotten caught in her throat because the way she coughed was absurd. I knew very well that Han Sora was scared of Jung Ha-Yan, but it was worse than I thought. It seemed like her common sense had vanished, and she was shouting

whatever came to her mind, so I felt like a fool for thinking that she had gotten better recently.

Naturally, I thought about how I shouldn't spend any more time here because I kept recalling the future Kasugano Yuno had seen and told me.

'Laios turning into a sea of fire.'

The fact that Kasugano Yuno didn't know the exact time when it was supposed to happen bothered me a lot. However, since that day could even be today, I started to feel even more anxious. If Jung Ha-Yan actually turned the city into ruins like what Kasugano had mentioned…

'There's no way I can fix it.'

I had to stop wasting time here, so I thought that taking her with me was the best option. When I spoke after taking a deep breath, she looked at me as if she was questioning what I was saying.

"Let's go. Right now. I'm going to go look for her right now."

"What?" Han Sora asked.

However, she nodded desperately when I said, "If you don't want to, you can stay…"

"I'll go! I'll go! Of course, I'll go. Yes, I'll go. Let's go together. W-We have to prepare quickly. Fast… Let's go quickly. That way we can work out this misunderstanding as soon as possible," she stuttered.

She hurriedly tried to stand up, but her legs gave out, causing her to fall. She reminded me of a newborn zebra. I immediately threw a shirt toward her and Han Sora prepared to leave while trembling.

"You won't be harmed or anything like that, so you can calm down, Miss Sora. I'll tell Ha-Yan that what she saw was a misunderstanding, so there's no need to worry," I assured her.

"Okay, thank you," she said.

"And you have to tell answer my questions earlier in detail. If you don't want to, you

can stay here by yourself," I added.

"Of… course… I'll. Yes, I will," she replied.

"You can follow a few steps behind me," I ordered.

"Okay, I'll do whatever you tell me to do. I'll do it and tell you everything. I-Instead, please—" she paused.

"I'll talk to her about what happened," I told her.

I spoke with confidence, but I was worried about myself right now.

'You're not the only one who's in a bad position, Sora… I'm in a bad position as well.'

I didn't know where Jung Ha-Yan went, but I had to hurry. I didn't know why or how Laios would turn into ruins, but I had a feeling it was getting close. Jung Ha-Yan running rampant would turn Laios into ruins. This was nothing more than an assumption, but right now, Jung Ha-Yan running rampant was the only reason I could think of why the city would turn into a sea of fire.

I wanted to run as fast as I could, but I couldn't because Han Sora was running while limping. She was worried that I would leave her, but at this point, I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to go together because there was no guarantee that the wild Jung Ha-Yan wouldn't attack Han Sora. After completing her goal of splitting us up, she might appear to finish the event she had started at the training school.[1]

Jung Ha-Yan probably didn't go far, so I was able to move while thinking about the situation.

"Let's talk about what happened earlier, Miss Sora," I suggested.

She seemed like she was too tired to run and talk at the same time, but she spoke for fear that I might leave her. She was desperate not to get separated from me.

"I-I don't know where to start…" Han Sora stuttered.

"Start with why you have the mana exhaustion symptom," I told her.

"It's because I'm the one who created that mana orb," she answered.

“You said you couldn’t create the same spell earlier…” I pointed out.

“No, I just cast the finishing spell and created it. I don’t know the process, but Miss Jung Ha-Yan transferred the spell to me, although I’m not sure if *transfer* is the correct word to describe it…” she replied.

“Is that possible?” I asked.

“It’s a one-time spell. Theoretically, it’s impossible, but the orb you saw earlier was made after I used all of my mana,” she answered.

‘Was it possible because it was Jung Ha-Yan who did it?’

Basically, the mana orbs were created after Jung Ha-Yan briefly borrowed Han Sora’s body, and she definitely made sure to mix their mana together so that traces would be more difficult to find. While Han Sora was creating the mana orbs, Jung Ha-Uan was probably casting another spell, and it was likely a spell to create confusion when the city started its investigation. Jung Ha-Yan cast the spell, but black magic caused it to manifest. I wasn’t sure if she knew it would happen, but there were still some traces of black magic Jung Ha-Yan couldn’t utilize.

My curiosity was somewhat resolved, and it felt like the puzzle pieces were falling into place.

“You didn’t think about telling me ahead of time?” I questioned.

“I’m sorry. I-I’m sorry,” Han Sora apologized.

I wasn’t blaming her because I completely understood why she acted that way. I didn’t know how the two ended up working together, but when the idea was mentioned, Han Sora probably couldn’t refuse Jung Ha-Yan’s offer.

‘As expected from a Black Mage… ’

I was surprised because it was as if she had gotten into a contract with Jung Ha-Yan. Han Sora was afraid of getting killed, so she couldn’t refuse. As such, she reacted positively to Jung Ha-Yan’s plan and supported her.

“She cast spells so that there won’t be any traces. That was the reason she used my body. I tried to stop her, but—” she paused.

I was sure she couldn't stop Jung Ha-Yan because she wasn't brave enough to do that.

"She was getting really stressed…" she continued.

"…"

"The more she thought about it, the more she fell deeper into her thoughts. She said everything was ruined because of those… Republic members… That was the conclusion she came to," she added.

"What was ruined?" I asked.

"She said she didn't like you thinking of her as a strange woman, but I told her it was because you were jealous and even though she really liked it at first, you became very busy after that…" she stopped talking.

"Are you saying she became more anxious?" I asked.

"Yes. Afterward, she kept mumbling words I couldn't understand. In the end, she said she thinks you dislike her now. She didn't have the confidence to look straight into your eyes anymore, so she had to fix it. I didn't know that this was what she meant. She said she had to prove her innocence and asked me to support her plan and although I had no idea what she was talking about, I-I just wanted to live… I didn't want to get hurt anymore… *Heuk*…" Han Sora explained.

'Shit… '

Han Sora kept talking, and it was definitely because she was sad. Honestly, I felt heartbroken as well when she started crying.

'I think it's my fault… '

The guest I wasn't happy to see caused me to push Jung Ha-Yan away and even though I thought I had made up for that, the problem was that it hadn't been enough for Jung Ha-Yan. It was my mistake to think that it had been enough because she became really quiet after the incident at the Cursed Shrine. I let my guard down as well because Jung Ha-Yan was being obedient, but an incident like this still occurred despite that.

'What did she mean when she said she couldn't look straight into my eyes?'

All I did was warn her about talking to bastards like Jin Cheong, so I couldn't understand why Jung Ha-Yan thought that she had become a strange woman. I also couldn't understand why she had to prove her innocence, but I was sure Jin Cheong would be the target of someone's resentment for the rest of his life for handing over a note to the wrong person.

'It's over.'

It felt like the end was getting closer, and the future Kasugano Yuno had seen kept appearing in my mind.

'I'm sure she doesn't want an ending where we all end up dying, right? Am I right?'

Even now, Jung Ha-Yan could be running around by herself, trying to prove her innocence, but regardless of what was going on, I was certain that I was in the worst situation.

When I turned around and looked out the window, I saw Jung Ha-Yan's back. She was running outside with her fists clenched.

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1. it's that Bootcamp where Han Sora first met Ha-Yan ☜

CHAPTER 314
JUNG HA-YAN INSTRUCTION MANUAL (8)

I naturally thought about catching up to her, but the limping Han Sora was slowing me down.

'Should I leave her?'

I thought about it for a moment, but Han Sora spoke as if she saw through what I was thinking through my expression.

"Don't leave me. I-I'll move as fast as I can. *Haaa… haa…*"

"…"

I wanted to carry her on my back, but I was really scared that Jung Ha-Yan might see that, too. What was more important right now was…

'Where did she go?'

I was curious about what Jung Ha-Yan was up to. I wasn't sure if she wanted to leave the scene or finish whatever unfinished business she had, but whatever it was, it wouldn't be good news to me. Obviously, I was worried that maybe a meteor would fall on the city when I recalled the comment Kasugano Yuno had made.

'Is this really serious… '

I wouldn't know how to react if this misunderstanding turned the city into ruins.

'Shit… shit.'

I focused my mana on my eyes and continued chasing after Jung Ha-Yan, but it wasn't easy because the city was still in chaos thanks to the incident. I was curious about where she was going, but there was a high chance she was going to the wasteland where the Republic members were located. She could be heading there to take care of the unfinished business.

Han Sora surely influenced her somehow, but the reason this was happening was the thought she had that I hated her. I couldn't help but think that it would be nice if Mind's Eye allowed me to read other people's minds. I was frustrated because I had no idea what Jung Ha-Yan was thinking. I was already having a difficult time grasping her thoughts using common sense, but this time, I totally had no idea what she was thinking.

While we were busy running through the alleyways, I still had no idea where Jung Ha-Yan went. One thing I was certain of was that she was heading toward the outskirts of the city, and it surprised me because that was far from where the Republic members were staying.

However, Han Sora started talking, "I think I know where she's headed."

"Where?" I asked.

"Toward the beach. I'll explain on the way there," she answered.

I wasn't going to abandon her even if she didn't say that, but Han Sora definitely wanted to ensure I wouldn't leave her behind.

"There's a place there where she created a magic circle. The circle was created to store Miss Jung Ha-Yan's mana in my body, but she customized the magic circle I created. She said it was a way to maximize magic output…" Han Sora explained.

"You still haven't gotten rid of it yet?" I questioned.

"I-I'm sorry, but Miss Jung Ha-Yan said she may use it later. She mentioned that she may have to go back there if her plan failed, and she said we should keep an eye on the situation after the first incident…" she replied.

"Shit. How could you leave any traces behind? Is it a place others can find?" I asked.

"People won't be able to find the location of the magic circle. A tough magic barrier was set up, so no one will be able to enter it other than Miss Jung Ha-Yan and me. And the barrier completely surrounds the location, so it won't be a problem. It'll be impossible to find and destroy it unless there's a high-ranking mage…" she explained.

Unfortunately, there was another high-ranking mage in Laios. I probably wouldn't be able to fix this issue this instant and work things out with the Republic, but if a magic

circle like that truly existed, then we had to get rid of it as soon as possible. If Jin Cheong moved faster than my expectations, then he could arrive at that place.

'Jung Ha-Yan sure did a lot of things. Shit… In such a short period of time as well… '

In addition to finding a place to manifest that spell, she even managed to place traps, as well as a barrier to completely surround the location.

By my standards, it would take over a month just to think about the preparations, but since it was Jung Ha-Yan, she could surely set this up quickly.

Han Sora was smart. Since she helped Jung Ha-Yan, I was sure that things worked out pretty smoothly, and they were unstoppable since no one was trying to stop them.

If Jung Ha-Yan was really headed there, then it was only right for me to think that she was going to activate the next spell and naturally, the firepower would be a lot stronger than the first one.

'I need to hurry.'

I had to get there before Jung Ha-Yan was done casting her spell.

"Is there a shortcut?" I asked.

"I don't know. We just have to head toward the beach," Han Sora replied.

"We have to pick up our pace. I think I should carry you," I suggested.

"Not that! P-Please… Miss Jung Ha-Yan may see us. Anything but that," she pleaded.

I couldn't help but pity her when I saw her having another seizure, but I was honestly in a hurry. Fortunately, I saw someone I was happy to see.

"*Huh?* Hyung-nim! You're here, too? Did you meet with noonim? She said she was going back because she had business to handle…" Park Deok-Gu said.

'Nice timing, Park Deok-Gu!'

He was helping the people clean up the debris, and he had to have gotten absorbed in the volunteer work because his face was dirty. He looked happy to see Han Sora

and me. He thought we came to join the clean-up, but after seeing our desperate faces, he realized that wasn't the case.

"Did something happen?" he asked.

"I'm glad you're here. Carry Miss Han Sora and follow me. You can tell Deok-Gu about the location you mentioned earlier, Miss Sora," I ordered her.

"Hey, w-what's going on?" he asked.

"Just follow me, and I'll explain later," I told him.

"Where did noonim go?" he asked.

"Don't say anything and just run," I commanded.

"I-I'll do whatever you ask me, but—" he stuttered.

"It's urgent, so we have to hurry," I said.

"Alright."

The trustworthy support appeared at the right time, and as if to respond to my expectations, he picked up Han Sora and started running. I immediately followed him. The more we followed Jung Ha-Yan's tracks, the more it felt like we were going to a desolate place.

I saw the ocean with white sandy beaches. We were supposed to visit this place no matter what, but since we got plunged into this kind of situation, I felt kind of bad. Unfortunately, it was out of the question to be emotional right now. This was a life-or-death situation, so even the ocean under the sunset didn't look beautiful in my eyes.

"Where in the world are we going?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Miss Sora," I called out.

"*Ah*, we're almost there. We need to head a little further in…" Han Sora answered.

"I'll take the lead from here, so just tell me which way to go, Miss Sora. I think it'll be

better if you follow a few steps behind me, Deok-Gu," I suggested.

"Got it. Are we entering a dungeon during a situation like this?" he questioned.

That wasn't it, but it felt that way. We were on the outskirts of the beach where there weren't any people and entering a dungeon even wild monsters had abandoned made me nervous. I was sure the inside was a maze because Jung Ha-Yan had reused an abandoned dungeon.

When Han Sora cast a spell, the magic barrier turned faint. Right when Park Deok-Gu and I entered, it felt like she entered the secret code. Surprisingly, once we were inside, the magic barrier instantly manifested once again.

It really felt like we entered a dungeon and if Jung Ha-Yan were the boss of this dungeon, then it would be impossible to capture it with this party.

When we went further in, we saw many barriers and Han Sora entered the secret code each time. After a long time, we found ourselves in a passage that connected to a path, and I thought it would be better for me to enter before anyone else. Han Sora said she wanted to come with me, but it seemed like she didn't want to face Jung Ha-Yan. When I quietly gestured with my hand, they both nodded, and I walked in while suppressing my nervousness.

I could see light from a magic circle pouring into the cave. It looked like a place where boss monsters of a dungeon would stay, but the sight could be considered beautiful to some people. Obviously, Jung Ha-Yan was at the center of the magic circle, and I saw her looking at me with messed up hair and bloodshot eyes.

"Ha-Yan," I called out.

"*Hiccup*."

The way she looked revealed that she was under heavy emotional stress.

"I-It'll be over soon," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

'What's going to be over… '

"I-I'll succeed this time! S-So please, forgive me. Forgive me. I won't say anything. *Hiccup*," she pleaded.

'Forgive what?'

"I-It's his fault. I'm not a strange woman," she continued.

"I never said you were a strange woman. The scene you saw with Miss Han Sora and me is a misunderstanding. Come over here. I'm okay, so come here," I told her.

"I know it's a misunderstanding, but the way you l-l-look at me has changed. I'm really not that kind of woman… You said we would go on a lot of dates, but all of it has been canceled. *Hiccup*. It's all because of those people. You said we would go to the beach together, but it was all canceled…" she complained.

"That's not true. It's not like that…"

"Even now you think I-I'm a bad woman. *Hiccup*. That's why you wouldn't meet with me!" she yelled.

'It's nothing like that. Shit… '

I had no idea where I should start clearing up this ridiculous misunderstanding. I had never imagined that a comment I made without thinking would cause this much problem.

'Why did this even happen in the first place?'

No matter how much I thought about it, I couldn't understand Jung Ha-Yan's thoughts.

"D-Deok-Gu oppa said this a long time ago. Once you start doubting someone, you'll keep doubting them… I was like that, too," Jung Ha-Yan started.

'Park Deok-Gu, you pig. Stop talking nonsense.'

"Y-You'll keep doubting me until that evil idiot disappears from this world!" she continued.

"I'm not doubting you, Ha-Yan. Really," I said.

"You say that, but you're doubting me e-even now. You think I'm easy! I can tell just by looking at your eyes. *Hiccup*…" she yelled.

“That’s not true. I would never—”

“I’m right. You’re going to keep doubting me,” she interrupted.

“I said that’s not true. Shit…” I cursed.

“I have to prove my innocence!” she added.

‘There’s no need to prove anything… Stop trying to prove your innocence.’

“Right now!” she screamed.

My eyes trembled as a large amount of mana beyond my imagination started to form.

‘Please not the sea of fire ending… ’

I repeatedly heard Kasugano Yuno’s voice like an echo.

“Jung Ha-Yan!” I yelled.

“I must prove my innocence!” Jung Ha-Yan repeated.

‘She’s crazy!’

A rumbling noise could be heard as dust started falling all over the place. The light of the magic circle continued shining on Jung Ha-Yan, and mana started gathering toward her.

“Ha-Yan, you don’t need to do that. You know how much I—”

“They have to disappear. Those idiots must disappear!” she shouted.

I kept on telling her that I loved her, but she had to be out of her mind right now because the enormous amount of mana was still there. If the magic manifested, people would definitely become suspicious of her. The possibility of becoming allies with Laios would be ruined, and we would be labeled as political enemies, which would cause the eventual collapse of the Sacred Democratic Country.

‘I neglected her too much.’

I didn't take care of her properly, and unbeknownst to me, Jung Ha-Yan was being emotionally cornered.

The magic was getting stronger, and the rumbling noise got even louder to the point that it felt like my ears were about to explode. Obviously, I thought about how we didn't have much time until the magic manifested and the moment Jung Ha-Yan uttered the spell, I was sure that a part of Laios would turn into ruins.

'We're doomed. Shit. We're done for… '

"*Ahhhhhhhhh!*"

When Jung Ha-Yan's eyes and mouth started emitting a dark red light, I had no choice but to yell a spell.

"L-L-Let's get married!"

The dungeon instantly went silent.

CHAPTER 315
JUNG HA-YAN INSTRUCTION MANUAL (9)

"L-L-Let's get married!"

The dungeon instantly went silent. I didn't actually hear it, but it felt like I heard something soar. The fluctuating mana and Jung Ha-Yan, who was in the middle of casting a spell, went silent. Naturally, the rumbling noise throughout the cave stopped as well. The sudden change in the atmosphere surprised me.

Jung Ha-Yan returned the normal. She wasn't emitting a dark red ominous light anymore, and her eyes were shimmering as her fluttering hair due to the influence of the mana came down. It was amusing how she looked like she doubted her ears. She tilted her head to the side, then revealed a look of surprise when she thought about what I said. Afterward, she looked as if she wanted me to confirm whether I had really mentioned marriage or not.

"W-What?"

'Damn it… '

"What?!" she asked again but with an exclaim.

'Shit… '

"M-M-Marr…" she stuttered.

Jung Ha-Yan seemed even crazier the way she kept mumbling, and it was difficult for me to judge whether I did the right thing or not because if I kept giving her carrots like this, she might get into the habit of creating an apocalyptic scenario just to receive more carrots. However, I couldn't think of any other way to stop her, and if I used some typical line, the spell might actually fall on the city. I thought about yelling at her, but when thinking about the possibility of her becoming even crazier…

'I made the right choice to stop Jung Ha-Yan.'

No, it was my only choice.

“O-One more time. Please tell me one more time,” she requested.

For some reason, I couldn’t say it again because it felt like an unknown nervousness was blocking my throat. However, there was no use crying over spilled milk, and if I told her that I made that suggestion just now without thinking, we could face an even bigger calamity. In the end, I had no choice but to repeat myself while closing my eyes.

“Let’s… get married, Ha-Yan.”

Since it would be a memorable proposal, I naturally got into the formal position, and the crying Jung Ha-Yan seemed like she was touched. Since I started all this, I had to fix it properly. Now that I thought about it, I remembered putting a few items in my pocket. I wasn’t sure if it were a coincidence or not, but I took out a ring I had acquired a long time ago.

“T-The way I look at you hasn’t changed. I… I just needed time to look back and think about my feelings for you,” I continued.

“*Ahh… ahh…*”

“I’m sorry if I made you sad,” I added.

Since I had said it without thinking, it would be difficult to fix. I wasn’t sure what exactly I needed to look back on, but even I thought the words I was saying were ridiculous. It was shocking to suggest getting married at a time like this, but I was sure Jung Ha-Yan would get emotional no matter what I said.

‘It’s better than the Sacred Democratic Country’s collapse.’

Even if I wanted to, I couldn’t get away from Jung Ha-Yan. The risk was big, but the benefits outweighed the risks. If this didn’t happen, I wouldn’t know what kind of relationship Jung Ha-Yan and I would have in ten years. I had to choose between getting backstabbed or an ending where we would live together.

‘I made the better choice.’

I didn’t want to experience betrayal or get backstabbed. I thought this choice was

more reasonable, but one side of me felt an unknown bitterness.

'Still… this wasn't what I wanted. Shit… '

"I haven't been taking care of you recently, and I'm sorry for that. I'm sorry for making you feel anxious as well, but it was a period when I had to look back on our relationship. Thanks to this incident, I realized how precious you are to me…" I started.

'I really wanted to look back on our relationship.'

I kept stuttering like Jung Ha-Yan. Even though I thought I was talented at lying, I really didn't like doing this.

"*Ahhh… ahh…* Oppaa… *Hiccup. Heuuuk*…" Jung Ha-Yan cried.

"You can answer later," I told her.

"No! No, no, no! Now! I'll answer now! R-Right now!" she yelled.

'You can answer later… '

I wanted her to give me some time, but she looked as if she would hang herself if she didn't answer me now. Before I could even say anything, she repeatedly nodded while crying.

"I do. I do. *Heuuung…* I do. I'll do it. I'll do it no matter what, even if the sky falls down. *Hiccup, hiccup*…" she added.

'Shit.'

After hugging the ring in my hand, she started bawling, and she looked both moved and accomplished. Before I could put the ring on her, she was already putting it on her left hand, and even though it was only for a moment, she seemed worse than the devil worshiper, Ito Sota.

'Shit!'

"It's finally done. Finally…"

Jung Ha-Yan looked happy. When I saw how she repeatedly nodded while talking to herself, I had no choice but to force myself to smile, even though my expression was different from hers. She didn't have the luxury to look at my face because she was busy wiping her tears with both her hands. To prevent another incident, this kind of work was necessary. I had to tell Park Deok-Gu and Han Sora waiting outside that the situation was somewhat under control now, but Jung Ha-Yan seemed like she wouldn't stop crying anytime soon. Whenever I thought she was calming down, she would start crying again.

"*Heuuuuuuuuung…* I love you. I love you. You're the only person for me, oppa. *Hiccup*," Jung Ha-Yan confessed.

"I love you, too," I told her.

When she ran into my arms, my chest instantly became wet.

"I'm never letting you go—never," she said.

"…"

I felt a chill when she mumbled those words, and after hugging me for a few minutes, she slowly moved away from me. She stood on her toes and slowly closed her eyes as if she was asking me to kiss her. In some ways, the scene did look like a romantic scene. Between the magic circle emitting various lights, lights in many different colors were shining down on us, and the puddle on the ground reflected those lights. Jung Ha-Yan was standing in the middle of this kaleidoscope of colors, waiting for me to kiss her. Those ignorant of the situation would think that this was a very beautiful scene, and to be honest, I was sure the events of today would be extremely distorted in Jung Ha-Yan's mind. Others would remember today's events as horrific, while Jung Ha-Yan would consider this moment a blessing.

The Jung Ha-Yan emitting dark red lights from her eyes and mouth just a few moments ago had vanished. Many married men and women often say bad things about marriage as a joke, but in my case, it couldn't be considered a joke. This cursed body of mine had no choice but to get closer to Jung Ha-Yan's lips to survive, and after kissing for a bit, I saw her swollen eyes looking at me. Naturally, she immediately talked about our marriage.

"*Hiccup*… W-When should we have our ceremony? What about our marriage

license…"

"*Ah*, that's—"

"What about having children? I-I'm okay with not having children. I'm worried that you'll focus on the baby, b-but I can have as many babies as you want! We're going on a trip right after the wedding, right?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"So…"

"I saved a lot of money! *Ah!* Are we going to stay at the Blue Guild? Well, it doesn't matter to me. I'm fine with any place as long as I'm with you!" she continued.

"*Ah*… yeah," I answered.

"I think it'll be nice if we lived in some place where no one can find us, but I know you don't like that. Still, I'd like to live in a quiet place, d-don't you agree? For our honeymoon, let's go to the Mirror Lake since I have always wanted to go there. I want to ride a boat, and if we go to the l-lake together, it'll be very romantic. I-I'll also cook for you every morning. I-I don't know much about this, but… I'll study hard about the things that are done at night! I'll study everything! *Hiccup*… I'm so happy. I'll also attend cooking lessons," she added.

"Let's take our time talking about those things later. What's important is that we're both thinking about the same thing," I told her.

"O-Okay. And—"

"And… don't tell others for the time being…" I requested.

"W-Why?" she questioned.

"I still have a lot of things to handle. I want to be with you right now, but I'm involved in a lot of things," I replied.

"What?" she asked.

"And…"

"Yes?"

“The marriage… I want to do it once I’m in a better position,” I added.

Since I started this, I had to fix it. It was the comment of a typical piece of shit who wanted to push back a marriage he wasn’t interested in.

Jung Ha-Yan was surprised for a moment, but she decided to be understanding. If we walk around and announced our wedding, I would be put in a difficult situation because I wouldn’t be able to handle Cha Hee-Ra’s rage.

‘It’s a typical excuse… ’

However, it was the last resistance I could do. I was already in the highest position, so there wasn’t a better position I could work up to. Still, saying that made her understand that she had to be more understanding.

“I-I’m okay with that. We can do it however you want. I-It can just be the two of us doing the ceremony… I don’t need anything else. I-I just need you…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“It’s because I don’t want that,” I told her.

“Still…”

“Let’s talk about this later. There’s no need to feel impatient… What’s important is that we feel the same way,” I added.

“Okay…”

“And it’s… a happy day, but there’s something I need to say about the recent incident. Let’s go back and talk,” I suggested.

“*Ah*…”

Jung Ha-Yan’s face turned pale when she finally realized what she had done. I was sure she had completely lost her mind earlier. I proposed to her without thinking because I was astonished by the deterioration of her mental health, but considering the fact that this would calm her down in the meantime, I couldn’t help but think that it wasn’t such a bad idea. It was also something she had been expecting for quite a while now. As such, she would naturally be worried that I would cancel our wedding if she made a mistake.

'Not bad.'

I could control her with this, at the very least. The sweeter the bait, the more effective it was. The only thing I was worried about was when this bait would be no longer effective, but she should remain calm for a year at the minimum. Right now, Jung Ha-Yan looked worried.

'Regarding her responsibility for the recent incident.'

I was certain she was thinking about it. The incident occurred because she was worked up and went on a rampage, but she wasn't dumb enough to not realize the seriousness of the recent incident. Earlier, she looked like a complete psycho, but after suggesting that we get married, she looked happy as if she had obtained the world. But right now, she looked like a puppy that got drenched in the rain. Jung Ha-Yan looked more nervous than I thought.

She started talking, "O-Oppa…"

"…?"

"I-I-I think someone's here," she stuttered.

Jung Ha-Yan's pale face looked as if she was asking me what we should do. Unfortunately, before I could thoroughly fix this internal issue, some external issues came up.

"Oh, man…" I muttered.

CHAPTER 316
IN THE NAME OF THE LIGHT (1)

“What?” I asked.

“I-I think someone is here and they’re trying to break the barrier o-outside. I’m not sure, but maybe…” Jung Ha-Yan answered.

“Can you check right now?” I asked.

“I’ll try…” she replied.

Jung Ha-Yan quietly cast a spell, and I was certain she was trying to observe what was going on outside using Anemone’s Eyes because that was the only way she could use to take a look outside. Naturally, I thought I had to do something as well, but when Jung Ha-Yan slowly opened her eyes, she looked kind of shocked.

“Who is it?” I asked.

“…”

“Hurry…” I urged.

“I-It’s him,” she replied.

“What?”

“That man. The members from the Republic,” she said.

“…”

Jung Ha-Yan glanced at me as if she was thinking that this situation might create another misunderstanding, but this wasn’t the type of situation where that could happen.

I started feeling more and more nervous. Naturally, I thought the fire I barely

managed to stop was going to burn again. Actually, the internal issue was no longer an issue because the reason I stopped Jung Ha-Yan in the first place was to avoid being labeled as a villain. I wanted to avoid being cornered by the entire continent and to achieve an alliance with Laios, but if we got caught now, not only would our efforts to establish an alliance end in failure, but the surrounding nations could start attacking us as well.

'How did they get here so fast? Shit… '

It proved that Jin Cheong was simply that competent, and it meant his knowledge of magic was so great he could move while tracking my traces. To feel the traces of someone wasn't an easy task for an ordinary mage and searching for the location Jung Ha-Yan had covered with a multi-layered magic barrier was impossible even for mages with stats over 90. They could have arrived here by following me, but it was still undeniable that the Republic came here pretty fast. How they followed me wasn't important. The fact that we got cornered because they followed me was more important.

Naturally, I immediately grabbed my head, which started aching because there were so many magic barriers, and there was also a large magic circle. Jung Ha-Yan was also in the middle of the magic circle so anyone could tell she manifested the magic.

'We're done for… What should I do?'

My head was hurting because the recent events were stressing me out.

"Can you erase the magic circle right now?" I asked.

"I-I can, but it'll take some time. It might even leave traces, and I think they're already breaking through the first barrier," Jung Ha-Yan answered.

'Shit.'

"What should we do?" she asked.

"Hold on," I told her.

"I think they're breaking through the second—"

"What?" I asked.

“They’ve reached the third one…” she continued.

‘How are they so fast?’

“Is there another exit?” I asked.

“No. There isn’t—s-should we look for one?” she asked.

“No…” I replied.

Even if we searched, an exit that had never existed wouldn’t just appear.

‘Damn it, damn… ’

We were criminals with no way out. The situation was as worse as a suspect getting caught by the police at the scene of the crime.

‘Park Deok-Gu and Han Sora are… ’

Now that I thought about it, I was getting worried about the two despite being outside, so I had to let them know about the ongoing situation. When I hurriedly left the cave, I saw Han Sora waiting for me anxiously along with a confused Park Deok-Gu.

“Did everything work out? Actually, why are we—”

“I’ll explain later,” I interrupted Park Deok-Gu.

“You’ve been telling me that you would explain. The curiosity is killing me,” he remarked.

Park Deok-Gu looked really curious, and he probably realized that the situation was serious based on my expression. Naturally, Han Sora wasn’t excluded because her face was turning pale, and it was obvious what she was thinking. She thought I wasn’t able to work things out with Jung Ha-Yan.

“Y-You worked everything out, right?” Han Sora asked.

“Yes. I took care of the incident,” I answered.

“R-Really?” she questioned.

“Yes. You don’t have to worry about it anymore,” I assured her.

“It’s just; you don’t look so good…” Han Sora pointed out.

“We have another problem. Let’s go inside for—Actually, I think it’ll be best if only Miss Sora enters. Keep standing guard, Deok-Gu. If something happens, I’ll call for you right away,” I ordered him.

Park Deok-Gu had to be excluded since he had no idea of the context of the situation. Based on his personality, I had no idea how he would react if he found out that Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora were the perpetrators who destroyed the city.

‘It’s better if he doesn't know.’

However, his frustration had to have reached its limit because he spoke loudly, “Hey, what’s going on?! I followed because you asked, but I have no idea what’s going on. Just now, the cave was rumbling and making all sorts of noises. Is Ha-Yan noonim inside? She caused that rumbling earlier, right? It sounded like she was screaming earlier… You need to explain to me what’s going on, so I can find a way to help!”

“I’ll explain later,” I told him again.

“Does it—” he started.

“What?” I asked.

“Does it have to do with what happened today…” he asked cautiously.

‘This pig is more quick-witted than I thought… ’

It was only for a moment, but I felt my heart drop. However, he said afterward caused me to tighten my fists.

“Do you know who it is? Do you know the culprit—no, did you get a hint? Is that why only mages are working on this?” he asked.

‘This bastard… ’

“Is that what’s happening?” he questioned.

‘My lovely pig!’

It briefly appeared, but an idea popped up into my head. I was astonished that I didn’t think of this earlier, so I couldn’t help but love the pig even more for giving me such a huge hint.

‘Bro!’

I wasn’t sure if it were a coincidence, but I slapped my knee after hearing his guess.

‘That’s it!’

It was the perfect solution. There could be variables, but so what? This was the only way.

“You’re right, Deok-Gu. You are absolutely right. Shit! How did you know?! *Hahaha*!” I laughed.

I looked at him with satisfaction, and Park Deok-Gu looked happy for guessing it right.

“Really? I mean, I knew that was the case! It’s my job as your younger brother to catch onto these things! I’m Park Deok-Gu, you’re younger brother, hyung-nim! But why did you hide that from me? Were you testing me or something?” he asked.

“It’s something we shouldn’t let Laios or others know just yet,” I replied.

“There’s no reason to hide it from me, though! I’m disappointed…” he muttered.

“I was going to tell you at the right time. It’s not because I don’t trust you; I just don’t have any evidence yet. It was also dangerous. Anyway, now that you’ve caught on, there’s nothing I can do about it. You’re absolutely right, Deok-Gu. *Haha*. Like you said, Jung Ha-Yan, Han Sora, and I were looking for the caster of the magic that fell on the city today, and although we’re uncertain, we have reached a conclusion,” I explained.

“But still…”

“Don’t be too sad. It’s all within my plans, but I need to look into the situation inside the cave again, so keep an eye out and see if anyone’s coming before we’re done investigating…” I commanded.

“So you’re asking me to stand watch?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Of course. You’re the only person I can rely on. You can do that for me right, Deok-Gu?” I asked.

“Of course, I can! Just leave it to me! This little brother of yours will make sure that not even a tiny ant can enter that place! I’ll hold my ground!” he replied confidently.

“Our Deok-Gu sure is reliable!” I complimented.

“You can trust me! But I’m starting to feel the pressure hearing you say that,” he said.

When I nodded repeatedly, I saw Park Deok-Gu holding up his shield, and I thought about how it would have been even better if Ahn Ki-Mo or Kim Ye-Ri were here. The situation seemed like the second part of my hidden camera prank for Park Deok-Gu, but that wouldn’t happen this time.

‘This bastard may not be an idiot… ’

I didn’t know how he appeared and offered his help at the right time. He did that while I was on the way here and even gave me a hint just now. I used Mind’s Eye and looked at Park Deok-Gu just in case, but he was still the same guy who snorted while holding his shield up.

During all of this, Han Sora looked at me as if she was asking me what I was talking about, but what else could I do? As one of the people who created this incident, she had no right to make that kind of expression.

I couldn’t hold in my laughter, so I quickly spoke up, “Miss Sora, please help me investigate inside the cave.”

“What?” Han Sora asked.

“Hurry. It’s urgent,” I added.

“What’s… going on? A-Are you sure there’s nothing going on? Is there…”

“It’s not what you think, so we must hurry,” I interrupted her.

“N-N-Nothing is going to happen to me, right? S-She isn’t angry, right?” she stuttered.

“She’s not angry, so please hurry inside,” I assured her.

“Really? Is that true? Am I getting sacrif—”

“I’m not telling you to come in because of that incident. Hurry up and go inside. This isn’t a request. I need you in there,” I told her.

“R-Really…”

“Hurry inside, junior. You’re needed in there to catch the villain! If you run away just because it’s dangerous, the innocent people who have been sacrificed—Anyway! I don’t the culprit behind it, but we have to get rid of the bastards who sinned against God and man! I don’t know where they’re from, but now that our hyung-nim is onto them, I’m sure they’ll pay for their sins! I’m sure of it! They’ll be completely destroyed! Villains will tremble in fear the moment they’re caught by Lee Ki-Young the Righteous!” Park Deok-Gu shouted.

“Yeah, we have to capture the villain no matter what. You’re right, Deok-Gu! I’ll leave this place up to you. Criminals usually return to the scene of the crime, so they might come back, and they might even know that we’ve already arrived here,” I explained.

“Don’t worry about it and leave it to me. I’ll stand my ground here until you and Ha-Yan noonim are done with the investigation,” he assured.

The issue about handling Park Deok-Gu ended right there and then.

When I quickly looked at Han Sora, she started walking as if she really didn’t want to do this. When she entered the cave, she flinched after seeing Jung Ha-Yan acting anxiously, but when Jung Ha-Yan ran toward me after seeing me, Han Sora sighed as if she felt relieved. Han Sora realized that the issue between Jung Ha-Yan and me was finally resolved.

“It’s a relief. I’m relieved… I’m not going to die…” Han Sora mumbled.

She even started crying, but we had no time to relax.

“I’m alive… It’s all been taken care of,” she added.

“Everything hasn’t been taken care of, Miss Sora.” I pointed out.

“What?” she asked.

“Let’s do one more thing,” I suggested.

“W-What do you…”

“You can summon, right?” I asked.

Han Sora looked at me as if she was asking what I was talking about.

CHAPTER 317
IN THE NAME OF THE LIGHT (2)

“You can do it, right?” I asked.

“I-I can, but… I have… never done it before…” Han Sora replied.

“Let’s try it. The more preparations we do, the better,” I suggested.

Despite saying that, Han Sora still looked at me as if she wanted me to explain in more detail, and it was understandable for her to feel confused. Han Sora was a black mage, but I didn’t allow Han Sora to get into any contract with demons because we had limited information on the demons she could summon. However, she had to do it right now. For us to build a more elaborate plan, it was necessary.

The first reason why it had to be done was that I could feel black magic from the mana orbs that fell on the city. Of course, there were other reasons, but I didn’t have time to explain each and every one. We had to move and ensure that the timing was right.

“But doing it right now is…”

“It’s fine. Ha-Yan can lend her mana to you, and this location will help you with all the preparations. We just need to borrow your body, Miss Sora. In exchange, I’ll be sure to reward you handsomely after this. Depending on the situation, I can even transfer you to a different region…” I offered.

I wasn’t planning on transferring her away, but when I saw how her eyes widened, I was sure she had taken the bait.

“I-I’ll do it!” Han Sora shouted.

“I can’t tell you exactly when that’ll be, but I’ll do whatever I can to fulfill your wishes as much as possible. Now, regarding the summon—” I mentioned.

“I couldn’t really study it because there isn’t a lot of available information about it,

but with Miss Ha-Yan's mana, I think it'll be fine to an extent. I'm just worried if I can really do it, but I-I think I can summon either a mid-tier demon or a high-tier demon…" Han Sora answered.

"I don't know exactly how powerful a mid or high-tier demon is, but you have to summon a demon that can cast the same level of magic as the one that fell on the city today," I instructed.

"A demon of the same level… I think a demon that can do that is rare even among demons, but I'll try," she responded.

When I saw how passionate she was after I gave her the hope of being transferred away, I couldn't help but think how she really didn't want to be with Jung Ha-Yan. Speaking of Jung Ha-Yan, she clenched her fists tightly as if she wanted to make up for her mistake. Even though I didn't explain anything, it seemed like she had an idea about my plan.

"Where are they now?" I asked.

"They're not close yet. I think we'll have enough time, oppa," Jung Ha-Yan replied.

"Let's start. Do you need a separate magic circle or anything else, Miss Sora?" I asked.

"No, I don't. I heard the summoning method for each demon is different and there are beings that can be summoned with mana alone. In the worst-case scenario, there are conditions we would have to fulfill, but… I have enough mana for now," Han Sora answered.

"If nothing else is needed, then it's a relief. I think it's best if we get started now. We don't have time to hesitate, so let's start," I ordered.

"Alright."

After I was done talking, Han Sora quickly ran to the center of the magic circle, and Jung Ha-Yan did the same. Han Sora's mana poured into the magic circle, and it was interesting to see her continuously mumble something while casting the spell. As the student who was once considered gifted, she had no issues casting it.

'She might succeed… '

Unfortunately, the light of the magic circle was getting dim, and anyone could tell that it wasn't a good sign. Jung Ha-Yan had to have thought about the possibility that the summoning could fail because she gave Han Sora more of her mana, and Han Sora started chanting even louder than before. Even I thought I had to do something. I wasn't sure if it was going to be helpful, but the moment I inserted my weak mana into the magic circle, a dark light started rising from where Han Sora was standing.

The cave started rumbling, and the bright light of the smaller magic circles started changing into dark lights. The dark lights didn't make sense considering where we were, but that was what I could see right now.

'What's this?'

I was shocked when the impact of the mana I had inserted ended up being bigger than what I had expected. In the end, when I wasn't able to open my eyes properly because of the light, a figure I couldn't describe with words appeared before my eyes.

'What's that?'

[Belial, the Demon of Lies and Instigation - Mythic Rank]

[72 Demon Lords]

[???]

'I can't believe something like that popped out… '

The monster with an indescribable appearance was looking down at me while floating in the air. Han Sora stared at the monster as if he couldn't believe the result she had achieved. Unfortunately, Han Sora proceeded with the summoning ritual with her crippled body, so she started to feel dizzy as she staggered.

- How amusing.

It wasn't amusing at all. Just looking at the monster alone was enough to overwhelm us. I wasn't sure, but I thought we didn't manage to completely summon the demon. Still, it commanded a shocking presence, and it felt like its voice was making my brain quiver. I didn't think that this demon was stronger than the Fragment of the Ancient God or that horned demon wielding seven weapons, but it was definitely stronger than us.

'It's a mythic rank demon.'

- It's truly amusing. How did you summon me here? I don't think it's the influence of this magic circle, and there aren't enough offerings to fulfill the condition of summoning me as well… Unfortunately, to summon me like this is a violation of the contract. This black mage isn't strong enough to control me either, and you haven't fulfilled all of the conditions.

However, what appeared was just a stronger demon. Our situation remained unchanged.

When I took a deep breath to breathe properly, I slowly calmed down. The aftereffects of summoning that demon had to be too great because Han Sora was still holding her head. I didn't know whether talking to the demon here was the right thing to do or not, but I decided to talk to it anyway because I was running out of time.

"I-I'm sincerely grateful that you answered the summoning."

- It was you.

The way the demon looked straight at me made me want to look at the ground. I was afraid I had done something wrong.

"What do you mean…" I asked cautiously.

- It was you, mortal. Your disgusting mana summoned me here.

"What?" I asked.

- It has been a while since I saw a human whose mana flow goes well with mine. It's unfortunate that you're not walking down this path. *Hm*… Anyway, since I have arrived in the real world, tell me your wish. A direct contract is impossible, but I'm sure you have a reason for summoning me, so I'll grant you your wish. Yes, I'll consider it as a celebration of meeting a human whose mana flow goes well with mine.

'It's working out better than I thought.'

I had no idea what the demon meant when it said mana flow, but it was good news

that the demon was showing kindness toward me. Since it was a demon called the Demon of Lies and Instigation, I was worried that it might backstab me while smiling. Fortunately, a demon could not harm its summoner. At least, that was the case for high-tier demons. Of course, I had no idea if a mythic rank demon could resist the system, but nothing would change even if I grew suspicious of this demon. After all, it wasn't like we could just send it back.

- I also like the fact that you're very suspicious of everything. You're a disgusting type of human I haven't seen for a long time.

'Are you complimenting me or insulting me? Shit.'

- But there's no need to be suspicious of me, mortal. All of you are precious. Not many of you can summon one of the 72 Demon Lords. The one who summoned me has the potential to grow even more. The same goes for the woman blessed by mana and the disgusting human whose eyes are better than ours. If you don't like having an indirect contract, I would recommend summoning the others, but looking at the condition of the summoner, I think the next summon will be difficult… If it's a simple request, I can help. There's no way you would know this, but what you have all done can be considered an achievement.

"An achievement?" I asked.

- It's nothing you need to be concerned about. It'll be easier for you to understand if I tell you that getting into a contract is profitable for us. It's really unfortunate. If you and I could get into a direct contract, you could have gotten into a contract with one of the 72 lords who hasn't been in a contract for a long time. Anyway, let's stop chatting. I think it'll be best to read over the contract first. Even though it's an indirect contract, it's still a contract.

"…Thank you," I said.

- It's insufficient, but I'll accept the mana you used to summon me as payment. It also includes the amusement I felt from this summoning. I really hope the content will amuse me…

It only took a moment for a black-colored contract to appear before me, and I thought it was safe to say that it was a unique ability of the demons.

I had no idea where or how they usually spent their time, but I didn't think they lived

in hell and often laughed among themselves as I had imagined.

The contract was pretty organized, even though it was an indirect contract. I didn't see any issues with it as well.

'Not bad.'

I was suspicious, but I instantly realized that the demon was being honest. The demon was one of the 72 Demon Lords, yet it was being kind to us. Unfortunately, Han Sora was the one who had to sign the contract. At this point, I couldn't help but think that it wouldn't have been so bad if I had become a black mage.

'It's really disappointing.'

If I had chosen to become a black mage, I might have tried to get into a direct contract with the demon. Actually, I may have gotten into a contract with this demon in my past life since I was a black mage in that timeline. Anyway, it was nothing but a pie in the sky, and all I could do right now was to read the contract thoroughly.

Han Sora looked like she was out of it, but she still kept glancing at me. Naturally, I nodded at her. I was telling her that there wasn't anything wrong with the contract. Han Sora looked like she was doubting me, but she started nodding positively.

- Since this is a special situation, I'll acknowledge all of you as my contractor. The contract is limited to the summoner, but I'm sure that she did not summon me with her mana alone.

"I'm sincerely grateful for your consideration, Lord Belial," I said.

- There's no need for flattery, you disgusting human. *Hahaha*. Anyway, tell me what you want. I don't know the context of your situation, but you summoned me because there's definitely something that you want.

Of course…

I quickly nodded in response, and the demon nodded at me to start speaking.

"The request is pretty simple, Lord Belial…" I started.

- Go on.

“I would like for you to fool a group of humans. That’s it,” I requested.

The demon started smiling, and it seemed that the demon really liked my request.

- Just hearing your request alone puts me in a really good mood, you disgusting human.

I just might be able to send friends to the demon worshiper Ito Sota, who was in hell.

‘Demon Summoner Jin Cheong!’

To completely get rid of the continent’s darkness was the right thing to do.

In the name of the light…

CHAPTER 318
IN THE NAME OF THE LIGHT (3)

The jaw of the adjutant who came with me[1] dropped since she was probably surprised by the barrier before us. She was also a mage, so she recognized the value of this magic. I could understand why she reacted that way.

“Is it interesting, Ludmila?” I asked.

“I-I’m sorry,” she apologized.

“No, I completely understand since you’re also studying this field… It’d be strange if you weren’t amazed by it,” I told her.

“It feels… as if we’ve entered a dungeon, sir,” she commented.

“Technically, this is far from a dungeon because this location isn’t being controlled by the system. It’ll be better if you think of this place as something someone had artificially created,” I explained.

“If that’s true, then isn’t that even more amazing? For a human to create this many magic barriers is… It’s difficult to comprehend with my knowledge…” she expressed.

“It’s possible—” I paused.

“Yes?”

“It’s possible if the mage specializes in this field. This is more about the technique rather than an issue with one’s mana… As you can see, it’s pretty complicated. Even if one is knowledgeable in magic, one won’t be able to recognize this place in an instant. The person that created this place either has a job related to design or has a special skill… It’s likely that they’re a legendary-ranked mage,” I continued.

“Legendary rank…” Ludmila repeated.

“This is most likely the work of someone with power on the same level as the Eight

Seats or the Republic's Five Tiger Generals. If I had to choose someone that fits this description, I'll choose the shaman in the Sacred Democratic Country. Unless the Magic Kingdom is hiding a mage…" I added.

"But the shaman isn't a mage. To be exact, she's more like a sorcerer…" Ludmila pointed out.

"Of course, she's not the one behind this. The mechanism of her sorcery is different from the magic we use. If she's the one who caused this, then I would've caught onto it immediately, but obviously, the Sacred Democratic Country won't do something stupid like that," I replied.

"In that case, sir…" she started.

"Yes?"

"Are you saying the person who created these barriers and the one who cast that spell in the morning are two different people?" she asked.

It was a sudden question, but I had to nod at her question. No matter how much I thought about it, it was difficult to conclude that the same person was behind both magic. The continent was full of stories I couldn't understand, but it was impossible for the person who cast the spell with a such formidable power to be the same as the one who cast this barrier spell that even I had a difficult time destroying.

Those two magics were different types belonging to completely different elements. Even if a mage focused on just one of the magic types, it would be difficult for them to become a high-ranking mage, so if one person were able to cast both, then they would be considered beyond genius.

"There's a high chance that it's not the same person," I said.

"As expected… Then, it would be right to assume that a certain group was targeting us." Ludmila pointed out.

"That's right. A nation probably targeted us and planned this out," I agreed.

"On the national level…" she commented.

"I don't know what their goal is, though…" I told her.

“Do you think it could be the Sacred Democratic Country?” she asked.

“I don’t think so,” I answered.

I couldn’t really say that they were completely innocent because I was suspicious about them. However, the Lee Ki-Young I knew wouldn’t have a reason to do something like this. A foreigner of the Republic was attacked and killed in a neutral nation. Based on those words, the incident would seem like a simple accident, but I couldn’t even begin to describe the political issues this would bring. I didn’t know Lee Ki-Young well, but he was the type to keep risks at a minimum. Based on his past moves, he seemed like someone who cared a lot about his safety and political position. I even experienced that nature of his when I played a simple game with him that day.

‘Could the Sacred Democratic Country be behind this?’

It was more convincing to say that it was someone else’s political maneuver to slander the two nations or to provoke the Republic. Even though the Sacred Democratic Country wasn’t stable yet, they weren’t dumb enough to do something idiotic like this. They were on a mission to form an alliance with Laios, so I was sure none of their members would do something this stupid.

‘The situation itself can be useful.’

If I didn’t think about the possibility of there being a third force trying to create conflict between us, I would have probably submitted a complaint to the Sacred Democratic Country. I didn’t know who they were or what they wanted, but I wanted to prevent moving outside as much as possible.

As we moved further inside while having various thoughts, the magic barrier was getting harder to destroy, and when I glanced back, Ludmila and the other mages were deep in thought. It was also surprising that the caster had set it up so that the archers wouldn’t be able to trace anything. The magic barrier was periodically erasing the traces within this place, but it was also preventing us from using other methods to track those traces.

‘It feels as if the mana has a mind of its own.’

It was just a passing thought, but the description was very suitable. I didn’t really know how to describe it, but that was what I thought as I looked at it, so obviously,

the mages seemed like they were confused while trying to track the traces.

'Did a human really do all this?'

I wasn't sure if archers skilled enough to track traces from hundreds of years ago would be able to track the traces here, but archers at that level didn't exist in the Republic. Actually, archers of that level were rare even amongst Elves, so even if they came here…

'They won't be able to read the tracks accurately.'

It was only thanks to the faint traces of black magic that we managed to find this place.

'Black magic… Black magic.'

I heard a voice beside me.

"Excuse me, sir."

"Yes?"

"I know it's not my place to tell you this, but I would like to suggest that you should head back… It doesn't matter what happens to us, but we're worried that something might happen to you, sir," Lumila suggested.

I understood why they thought that way, but we couldn't postpone this.

"I'll be fine. I prepared something, and the investigators from the Republic have probably arrived by now. I understand that we're taking a risk, but we spent a lot of time chasing after this track. After a spell manifests, the mana floating in the air usually lasts only about five hours. In this situation, it'll probably last seven to eight hours, but that's not a long time," I explained.

"Seven hours…" she repeated.

"The mana in the air is *that* thick, and we have to keep tracing the remaining mana as long as it's still in the air. If we don't track it within today, everything will most likely disappear," I continued.

“But the president will be worried, sir. If the caster who cast such a powerful spell is targeting you, sir—” she paused.

“I can protect myself. All right, break time’s over now. We’ll move faster than before,” I ordered.

“Yes, sir.”

“Please prepare the spell immediately. I’ll take the lead,” I added.

“Understood.”

Now that we had momentum, it didn’t take long for the unofficial investigators to move deeper into the cave. I started to feel an ominous magic the deeper we walked in, and the more barriers we destroyed, the more mana flowed out from the blockage.

‘It’s inside.’

Evidence or something that could be a hint about the recent incident.

‘It could be a trap… ’

Fortunately, we prepared more than enough insurance for any attacks.

As we continued walking, I saw a large cave that made me stop in my place. What I saw inside was something I had never expected at all.

“S-Sir… that’s…” Ludmila pointed out.

“I can see it as well,” I told her.

“Sir… what… in the world—” she paused.

“A demon…” I said.

“A demon?” she asked.

It was a monster with an extremely large figure. Its face looked like it was surrounded by fire, and its eyes were like abyssal flames. Its mouth looked like it was

cracked, and its wings seemed like it was tucked beneath the dark sky. The demon's outer appearance was enough to overwhelm anyone. It was difficult to describe its dignified form, and the mages surrounding the demon looked really small and pitiful before it.

Everyone could only stare at the demon. Some of them couldn't stop their legs from trembling. They couldn't stand properly because they were overwhelmed. Even I could only bite my lips in front of it.

'This… a being like this… actually exists? On this continent?'

I couldn't describe it any other way, and I started to feel like I was suffocating. While traveling around the continent, I had seen many unusual beings, but none of them managed to instill fear in my heart like this demon.

'A being like this… This doesn't make sense… '

"R-Run…" Ludmila stuttered.

"No, Ludmila. There's no need to run," I told her.

"What?"

"It has been sealed," I informed.

"*Ah*…"

"I think someone sealed the demon. I'm not sure if they're here from the beginning, but that demon is unable to move on its own right now. I don't know who sealed a being like that in a place like this, though…" I explained.

"Is it a black mage?" she asked.

"Yes, and I guess that they're a very high-ranking black mage at that. I studied black magic for a little bit, but I have never heard of a way to control a high-tier demon like that one. Maybe—" I paused.

I couldn't help but think that the power of the demon had destroyed the city. The most convincing evidence was right in front of me, and the magic circle used to summon the demon was recently created. I noticed the confinement spell that was

used to seal the demon as well, and when I saw that, I could finally explain why there were traces of black magic on a spell that compressed everything and why the concentration of mana in this place was extremely thick.

'I wonder what it's after.

The chances were low, but I had to consider the possibility of it targeting other nations as well. Even though I thought the assumption was absurd, it was possible that black mages holding a grudge against the Sacred Democratic Country, Republic, and even the neutral nation were the perpetrator behind all this. After all, there were black mage clans working behind the scenes. In addition, we had to consider many different possibilities thanks to the scale of the incident. Regardless of the reason, the important thing was that we had to let people know about this.

"Send a report to the Republic first and then to Laios. Next, I want this place to be cordoned off. Afterward, make sure that the members dispatched to Laios can come here, and that's the top priority. I'm saying this just in case, but all of you here didn't see anything. Nothing…" I warned.

"O-Of course, sir…" Ludmila stuttered.

"Then, right now…"

Before I could continue, I saw someone on one side of the cave.

'What's that… '

I couldn't quite make it out because it was dark, so when I focused my mana on my eyes, I saw a familiar face.

'Lee Ki… Young?'

I couldn't understand why he was here. It was like seeing an unexpected person in an unexpected place. The Sacred Democrat's Honorary Cardinal was with the sealed demon, and I didn't really know how to describe this situation.

But before I could say anything, he spoke, "It was you. The summoner who summoned the demon in this place… Was it… really you?"

"What?" I asked.

“I asked if you’re the one behind this, Jin Cheong,” he repeated.

“What are you…”

‘What a load of bullshit… ’

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1. Jin Cheong’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 319
IN THE NAME OF THE LIGHT (4)

I had no personal grudge against Jin Cheong, but he was the one who coincidentally followed me. He could become an enemy, but the reason didn't really matter. The identity of the scapegoat wasn't important; the only thing that mattered was that I would get out of this mess, and right now, this was the best I could do. To me, it was like the perfect prey came at the perfect time. To be honest, I was relieved that Jin Cheong was the one who followed us here because if he remained active out there, I could end up in danger. He followed us all the way here, even though it hadn't been that long since the incident ended, so I was sure that given enough time, he would surely discover that we were the ones behind all this.

'It has to be him.'

I took the initiative to speak up because I had to warm up and rather than pushing him into a corner from the start, I thought easing into it was better.

"Was it really you?" I asked.

"W-What are you…"

Jin Cheong looked shocked, and I was certain that he was trying to figure out what kind of bullshit I was spouting. He had probably already come up with several possibilities. The first possibility was that I misunderstood what was going on and although he seemed to be at a loss for words, he started talking. "I think there's some sort of misunderstanding here. We also came here by following the traces. Actually, how did you all end up—I should be the one asking how you got in here."

"Is that true?" I questioned.

"This is also our first time here," he answered.

"Can you prove that?" I asked.

"We can't trust you as well, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. Before asking us why we're here, you

have to prove why all of you are here. How were you able to enter this place? Depending on your answer, I may need to use other methods," he warned.

"We're also in a position where we may have to use force, Mr. Jin Cheong," I told him.

'I'm sure of it.'

He wasn't blaming us just yet. I was confident in doing this type of acting, but when the situation was getting better, I started to feel proud of myself. Internally, he could be suspicious of the Sacred Democratic Country, but on the outside, he didn't seem that way. As he said, it didn't make sense how we ended up here, so obviously, he had to keep that possibility open.

Before I could say something, Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan were already wary of them. The atmosphere became tense when Jung Ha-Yan started preparing a spell and to be honest, Park Deok-Gu's acting was better than mine. Actually, he wasn't acting, so it was more realistic. When I first brought him into the cave, he was so shocked he couldn't close his mouth, so it was understandable for him to react sensitively. Jung Ha-Yan, who was trying to make up for her mistake, and Park Deok-Gu, who was sincerely worried about this situation, synergized and were in harmony.

'It's perfect.'

If Ahn Ki-Mo and Kim Ye-Ri were here, I was sure we would handle this mission even better.

"Deok-Gu," I called out.

"Hyung-nim," Park Deok-Gu answered.

"I don't think we need to put our guard up yet. I think there has been a misunderstanding," I ordered.

"B-But… I think we should still keep our guard up. There's a possibility that he's the one who summoned that huge monster." Park Deok-Gu pointed out.

"I disagree. It could be a trap, but I don't think he'll openly do something like this," I told him.

"But still…"

“He’s not that kind of person. I think there has been a misunderstanding, so put your guard down for now. It’s not a request, Deok-Gu,” I ordered again.

“If you say it like that, hyung-nim… But I’m going to stay right beside you because I don’t want to leave you here for too long. If that thing wakes up—”

“H-He’s right, Oppa! There’s a demon… T-T-That bad man might…” Jung Ha-Yan interrupted Park Deok-Gu.

It was ridiculous how Jung Ha-Yan suddenly started acting while I was in a dialogue with Park Deok-Gu and when I looked directly at her, she became quiet. She understood that I was telling her to stay quiet. From time to time, I would notice her giving Jin Cheong a threatening look, and no matter how much I thought about it, it would be unreasonable to place Jung Ha-Yan at the front.

Anyway, it felt like my order released the tension a bit and when I took a step forward, Jin Cheong’s group somewhat lowered their guard as well, but despite that, they seemed sensitive about their safety. Mages were mumbling spells and Jin Cheong was glaring at me quietly.

‘That’s how it usually goes… ’

If I were Jin Cheong, I would have considered the possibility of being attacked. If he believed we were the ones who summoned that demon, then it was understandable for him to be worried about us getting rid of the witnesses. Unfortunately, what I wanted wasn’t their death.

‘It’s actually the opposite.’

To be honest, if it weren’t for Park Deok-Gu, we wouldn’t even have that kind of conversation. The way his body kept releasing cold sweat because he was terrified of the demon showed that he was sincerely worried about our safety.

“Shit… Well, if you’re going to have a conversation with him, do it quickly. Actually, what are we supposed to do in this situation?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

Naturally, I nodded while talking, but it wasn’t toward Park Deok-Gu.

“I’ll explain the details first, Mr. Jin Cheong. While we were on standby, we tracked down the traces of mana floating in the air and the vestiges of the black magic from

the magic that fell on the city today, which led us here. Of course, we didn't receive any orders from the Sacred Democratic Country to do this. I just thought we had to do something before the investigators dispatched by the Sacred Democratic Country started moving. We had to resolve this before the mana disappears completely."

"I'm in the same situation. The Republic probably doesn't know about this yet, but… What about the magic barrier?" Jin Cheong asked.

"It's difficult to explain. How did you come all the way here? As for destroying the magic barrier—"

"It's difficult for us to explain as well. However, I'll tell you one thing I'm sure of—we're not the ones behind this. I can't prove it right now, but once we begin the official investigation, I'm certain we can decipher the traces," he replied.

'I can't let the official investigators get here.'

"Regarding Laios…" I mentioned.

"I'm not going to report it just yet. To be honest, I wanted the Republic to handle this situation first, but—" he paused.

"The situation has changed," I said.

"Yes, I didn't think I'd see you here. By the way… when did you arrive here?" he asked.

'He's trying to find out my intentions.'

"We just arrived here—we arrived here a few hours before you arrived and it hasn't been that long since we found the sealed demon and the magic circle. Someone sensed us coming in, and I think that person is the one behind all this. I don't think they'll just leave these traces and this powerful figure behind, so I believe they're going to come back," I replied.

"…"

"They may try to complete the goal they weren't able to complete with the magic they used today, or they may have a completely different goal. To be honest, I haven't thought about the possibility of this being a fabricated scenario by the Republic—"

“The foreigners of the Republic are the ones who died, Father Lee Ki-Young. Please watch what you say,” Jin Cheong interrupted.

“I apologize. I shouldn’t have said that,” I said, nodding.

“I guarantee that the Republic has nothing to do with the recent incident. Rather, it’s more convincing to say that there’s a third party trying to encourage a fight between the Sacred Democratic Country and the Republic. That’s under the condition that the Sacred Democratic Country has nothing to do with this…” he explained.

“A third party,” I repeated.

“It’s only an assumption, but after seeing the relation between the magic barrier, the magic that fell on the city today and the demon in front of us, it’s highly likely that a group is behind this. It’s simply an assumption, but… we must consider the possibility of the Black Mage Clan being behind all this…” he continued.

“It’s convincing. I don’t know much about black magic, but the figure in front of us isn’t an ordinary being…” I pointed out.

Suddenly, a dense, overwhelming energy filled the area, and Park Deok-Gu sensed the danger first. He had this stupefied look as he protected us, and I was sure he protected us out of instinct. Jin Cheong’s group also looked at the demon with dumbfounded expressions, as they were worried that it would move.

And that was when the large demon’s eyes slowly opened.

“It wasn’t sealed… prepare for battle! Prepare for battle!”

Before I could say anything, monsters with indescribable appearances popped up from the ground.

“Shit…” I cursed.

Jin Cheong was shocked. Meanwhile, Park Deok-Gu started swinging his shield, worried that the same thing that happened during Park Yeon-Joo’s incident might happen again. Jung Ha-Yan exaggerated her acting by biting her lips, and we started to get into formation as I reacted to the situation.

“A trap? Mr. Jin Cheong, let’s stay together for now…” I suggested.

“Yes, I think that’s—”

“*Uh*…”

“*Huh*?”

We were both astonished, but I was acting while his reaction was genuine. It was understandable for him to be puzzled while watching the situation right now because these strange monsters were threatening the Sacred Democratic Country’s side. Unlike us, Jin Cheong and his minions looked as if they were being protected by the monsters.

“W-Was it really you?” I asked.

“No. That’s… not. No…” Jin Cheong stuttered.

“You… piece of shit! How could you do something like this while acting innocent?!”

Park Deok-Gu’s voice was filled with anger.

“What the…”

“Did you set up this trap with the intent of pulling us in here?” I questioned.

“That’s not it. It’s a misunderstanding…” he said.

“Were you the one who—were you the one who attacked Laios?” I asked.

“It’s a misunderstanding. We have nothing to do with this,” he repeated.

Despite what he said, the monsters were only attacking us, and even though all of this was just an act, the way Park Deok-Gu swung his shield was so realistic the situation seemed real. I felt kind of bad for him, but he would be the number one contributor in resolving this situation.

“Shit. Prepare for battle! Prepare for battle!”

At the same time, the demon lord started talking…

- My contractor, Jin Cheong. Your wish will come true. Hurry and break this seal! If

you do, you'll obtain an even greater power!

It was time for the Demon of Lies and Instigation to take part. After this, Jin Cheong started cursing, and since he was smart, he immediately realized what I had done.

"You piece of shit!" Jin Cheong yelled.

From the beginning until the end, everything was done on the fly, but it looked as if we had planned all these out.

- Do you want power?! Jin Cheong! Your wishes will come true!!

CHAPTER 320
IN THE NAME OF THE LIGHT (5)

In an instant, demons charged at us from all sides. Park Deok-Gu got into his defense position while keeping the mages as close as possible, but he looked as if he had a sense of duty to protect us no matter what. I was thankful and sorry at the same time, but we weren't what was important right now.

- Hurry and break my seal, Contractor Jin Cheong! You'll acquire an even greater power!

"You crazy bastards! Crazy bastards! Crazy bastards!" Jin Cheong yelled.

- I'll give you infinite power! Jin Cheong!

"Lee Ki-Young! You bastard!" he yelled again.

'Wow, he's really something.'

I thought I finally understood what Belial meant when it said we worked well together. As if we were part of the same theater club, it was amazing how the demon was saying lines I wanted it to say. More than that, I was satisfied because it seemed like it was enjoying it. Just like its title, Demon of Lies and Instigation, it felt pleasure whenever it was tormenting its opponents, and I felt the same way.

What Jung Ha-Yan had done stressed me out, but Jing Cheong's frustrated face relieved me of my stress. I knew an event like this once in a while would help me live a vibrant life.

- This city! No, I'll grant you the power to completely destroy this continent! Jin Cheong!

"Y-You low-life piece of shit!" Jin Cheong screamed.

- Break this seal! Jin Cheong! Hurry!

The sealed Demon Lord of the 72 Demon Lords kept calling for Jin Cheong, and the scene was just too perfect. He was cursing at me, and Park Deok-Gu and the rest of our party were fighting against the demons surrounding us. It was questionable whether the rest of the party was acting or if they were taking this seriously because they were fighting desperately. I spread Dragon Breath Potions everywhere, and Jung Ha-Yan cast spells in succession against the demons. Every time a demon was killed, another demon would immediately take its place, so if all these weren't just an act, I would have shat my pants long ago.

Han Sora finally appeared, and she seemed really exhausted, which made the situation even more realistic.

"Don't lose, Deok-Gu, Ha-Yan. If those demons managed to escape into the world, Laios will be in danger. We have to break through, not endure their encirclement. Don't let that demon's seal break! Are you okay, Miss Sora?" I asked.

"I think the black magic is gnawing away at her, Oppa. Miss Sora is…"

Jung Ha-Yan said the line we prepared beforehand. I wanted to avoid being investigated, but there was a possibility that Han Sora might end up in a bad situation, so we had to create this situation.

"Hold on just a little bit longer, Miss Sora. You must resist the black magic," I told her.

"Hyung-nim! We have to get away!" Park Deok-Gu advised.

"That's not important right now. Listen to me, Deok-Gu. Even if I die here, we have to seal that demon," I said.

"H-Hyung-nim!" he yelled.

Park Deok-Gu revealed a sad look, and it was a ridiculous sight to behold. But to be honest, even I was embarrassed to say the final line because of its absurdity.

Still…

'This video will be sent over to the Vatican.'

It was kind of embarrassing, but this type of video was enough to receive a standing ovation from the powerful elders of the Vatican. I was certain that Father Basel

would really like it as well. As such, I grabbed the prayer beads around my neck, and we recorded my prayer to the Goddess of Benigoa.

“Goddess of Benigoa, even if your servant loses his life today, never—”

“Even if I die today! I won’t let you die, hyung-nim!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

Park Deok-Gu seemed to have experienced a moment of eureka while I was praying since he became stronger than before. Swinging his shield with all his might, the lower-ranked demons were instantly annihilated upon making contact with his shield.

“You servant of a dirty demon! How could you do something so evil while wearing the mask of a human?! I can’t believe you’re trying to get the benefits yourself by using your comrades!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

When I saw that a meaningless sense of justice was burning inside Park Deok-Gu, I couldn’t help but think that I had made a good decision by not telling him about these arrangements. Meanwhile, Jung Ha-Yan was still preparing her spell, and she was definitely displeased to see Jin Cheong because there was a fire burning within her eyes. She had the eyes of a righteous mage unleashing her anger upon the demon summoner trying to destroy the world.

“Don’t lose. We have to stop him from breaking the seal!” I ordered.

“You think I’ll fall for a cheap trick—” Jin Cheong started.

‘Of course. Why won’t you fall for it?’

Jin Cheong knew I had the magic hologram technology.

‘He knew who I was from the very beginning… ’

As such, he should have known long ago how I climbed up to my current position with great results, as well as the meaning behind the move I made that day when we played that game. I wasn’t that much of an achiever with my actual skills, and the majority of my accomplishments were made by means of bluffing, rumors, instigation, and fabrication.

So if Jin Cheong were expecting me to fight him fair and square, he would be sorely

disappointed because he and I were on an entirely different level.

'Resisting won't help you that much… '

I checked it myself, so I knew that being guided by the magic itself or sensing the remains of black magic was credible information. Instigation could be done with just a single sentence, but one needed dozens—no, hundreds of pieces of evidence to clarify it. A simple sentence had caused all these, so it was funny to look down on the outcome this kind of video could bring. If this video were released, Jin Cheong would most likely have to spend all his life trying to clear his name. Unfortunately, we couldn't manifest a magic hologram over Laios right now. If I didn't have to think and plan all these carefully, I would have directly shown everyone the unedited version of the video.

"You think I don't know that this is a situation created by you guys?! Do you really think the people will fall for a ridiculous trick—" Jin Cheong started.

He had definitely returned to his senses because he started giving excuses, but it wasn't that effective. In fact, the mages beside him started looking at him suspiciously.

"No one will fall for this. No one will be tricked by this fabricated situation…" he continued.

That was all the excuse he could give, and in the edited version of the video we were making, he would be saying that line in the demon's voice.

"*Cough!*"

"H-Hyung-nim!" Park Deok-Gu called out.

"I'm okay, Deok-Gu. Hurry!" I urged.

"You evil bastards! How dare you!" he yelled.

No matter how much Jin Cheong yelled, the level of desperation between us was different. We were going to edit this video anyway, so it was obvious what the public would think of this incident. Moreover, Belial was also doing its job, so it felt like I had an entire army by my side.

- Are you hesitating after coming this far? Jin Cheong! Take my hand and break the seal!

“S-Shut up, you demon! Don’t call for me with those dirty lips of yours!” Jin Cheong yelled.

- Jin Cheong!

He tried to defend himself, but he realized there wasn’t anything he could do other than kill us to get rid of the evidence. However, he looked like he was hesitating about it.

‘That’s right… ’

He knew that the moment he attacked us, the situation would only get worse, and it was amusing to see him struggling. This was the move of a real general, and it was a checkmate. All of a sudden, I remembered the look on his face when he said he would give me a hundred moves.

‘I’ll give you a hundred seconds, then, you bastard. Thanks, I really appreciate it!’

I was really glad that Jin Cheong came at the right time and to the right place. Otherwise, I would have to think hard on how I could handle this situation.

‘What will you do?’

Was he going to kill me or take the blame? Perhaps he would just run? Of course, he couldn’t do any of those. Since they were assuming that Belial and I had a contract, they should be worried about their lives. Obviously, Belial and I didn’t make *that* kind of contract, but they didn’t know that, so it was just natural for them to act cautiously.

- Jin Cheong! Hurry!

“Shit…”

Jin Cheong realized that he didn’t have a choice.

That was when I heard the voice of the demon in my head…

[This is fun. Very fun.]

'I'm glad you're satisfied, honorable and great Belial.'

[I told you there's no need for flattery, you disgusting human.]

'It's not flattery. I'm just speaking the truth. By the way, why are you speaking to me in private like this?'

[*Ah!* It's nothing serious, but I think there's an issue in the contract.]

For a moment, I almost couldn't hold back cursing. I did expect something like this to happen, but I never thought that the demon would backstab me like this.

[Don't worry, mortal. It won't harm you. Didn't I tell you? You're important. There aren't a lot of people who can summon one of the 72 Demon Lords to the real world.]

'Then, what is it that you want?'

[The contract stated that I should trick a few people.]

'That's right… '

[But in the end, aren't you tricking all the humans on the entire continent?]

This quick-witted bastard…

[To think that you're trying to even trick me, the Demon Lord of Lies and Instigation. It's been a long time since I met a disgusting human like you. I guarantee that if you took my place, you'll fit right in.]

'T-Thank you, and I apologize… '

[I messed with the contract a bit as well. I thought about punishing you, but I felt a strange connection with you. I'll be satisfied if you paid a bit more. So, regarding the contract you read…]

'Yes?'

[You didn't think the contract you read and the one the black mage read were the

same, did you?]

'What?'

There was only one contract, so I was sure that Han Sora and I had read the same contract. However, I suddenly realized that the content of the contract we were reading could have actually been different.

'What a dumb mistake… This is crazy!'

I nodded, and Han Sora signed it. I made a mistake by thinking that we were reading the same contract. I should have been more mindful of the fact that I was dealing with the Demon of Lies and Instigation.

[Don't worry, disgusting human. Didn't I tell you? I'm just going to receive my payment, and the reason that black mage signed without any suspicion was that you approved it. Basically, she signed it because it was something you would have done yourself. If the contract terms were absurd, the black mage would have questioned it.]

'Then… the content of the contract… '

[Didn't I tell you? I'm just going to receive my payment. That's all.]

In the blink of an eye, the heavens rumbled chaotically as the sky itself was split open. The demon grew bigger, and it dropped several large orbs on Laios. All of a sudden, I recalled Kasugano Yuno's shocking prediction about the city turning into ruins. The unexpected sight caused everyone's jaw to drop. I was sure that the mana maintaining the demon's form wouldn't last that long, and even though the orbs would most likely be unable to kill all the humans in the city, they would still cause a lot of damage.

'Shit, Han Sora!'

I had basically agreed with Han Sora destroying the city by letting her sign the contract without questioning my decision.

'Too many people are watching… '

As long as the people's suspicion wouldn't fall on us, I was willing to tolerate this, but

if possible, I wanted Laios to remain intact rather than in ruins. While I was having these complicated thoughts, the orbs were still falling on Laios. I obviously wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to frame Jin Cheong even more. I thought about it for a few seconds, but…

[Legendary-Ranked Forced Quest Activated.]

[Save Laios from danger as soon as possible, you bastard (0/1)]

“Jung Ha-Yan!” I cried out.

The light would always win.

CHAPTER 321
IN THE NAME OF THE LIGHT (6)

Booooom.

The sky was split open with a loud rumble.

“Oh, God!”

Pristina[1] exclaimed without realizing it, and the others did the same. The servants stared at the sky with wide eyes and what they saw was a large demon. The strange demon’s appearance was indescribable. When the demon opened its mouth that was big enough to devour a city, an incomprehensibly huge dark red orb fell from the sky.

- Contractor, Jin Cheong. Your wishes will come true!

If this was the reality, she didn’t want to believe it.

All of a sudden, the city was in danger, and all Pristina could do was look at the sky in silence.

- Thank you! Thank you! Jin Cheong!

‘Jin Cheong?’

She had no idea what was going on. Rather than thinking about why that demon had just uttered the name of a Republican soldier, all she thought about was escaping from this surreal situation happening before her.

‘Everyone will die.’

If that thing fell, many people would die, and that was the only thought she could have. It was the same dark red orb that had fallen on the city earlier. The city’s shield magic was quickly activated, but it instantly shattered with a cracking sound.

‘Mother… Father… ’

Laios—a neutral nation with a rich history.

'You have to protect it.'

Yes, Father…

'You're not on top of the people, Pristina. They must exist for you to exist.'

Yes, Mother…

'The royal family exists to protect the nation, Pristina. We must protect what the royal family values until the very end.'

Yes, Father…

'Don't forget. They must exist for us to exist. Don't forget that, Pristina.'

Yes, Mother…

"No…"

Everyone would die…

"No… No!!!"

The subjects she loved dearly would die. Her breathing turned ragged, and she could hear screams from everywhere. The mages tried to activate the shield magic again, but one by one, they started spitting out blood.

"*Ahhh*, my God. Please… please save us. Please. I'll do whatever you want. I'll do anything if it means saving Laios. Please save the city. Please…" Pristina begged.

"Your Majesty, you must get away! Hurry!"

"My God. Please… I beg you. Please," she pleaded.

"Your Majesty!"

"Please…!"

Craaaaaackle.

Despite her pleas, the dark red orb was still falling on the city.

'It's over… '

Everything was over.

And when that thought popped into her mind…

"*Ahhhhh*…"

Booooooooom!

A spell suddenly blocked the huge dark red orb.

"*Huh*…"

The spell emitted an extremely brilliant light to the extent that she couldn't open her eyes properly.

"*Ahhhh*… my God."

If Laios managed to survive today's events, Pristina vowed that she would tell everyone that a brilliant light had saved the nation.

* * *

'I[2] *should change the color of the magic… it doesn't look good.'*

It wouldn't look good if we used magic with the same color as the demon's dark red orb to block the latter. I wasn't blaming Jung Ha-Yan, but it was unfortunate because the biggest problem right now was whether the dark red orb could be stopped or not. Of course, I would have been more satisfied if a bigger light in a different color was used.

[Legendary-Ranked Forced Quest has been activated. Please grab her hand. *Crack* (0/1)]

“What?”

[Grab the hand of the human blessed by mana. Grab Jung Ha-Yan’s hand, you piece of shit. I won’t repeat myself. Grab her hand (0/1)]

The situation was kind of funny. I knew there were subjective opinions in the overall review displayed through Mind’s Eye and the quest windows the system showed, but I had never imagined that it would tell me to do something in real life. I didn’t know if the others could see what I was seeing, but one thing was for sure…

‘Someone is watching.’

There was a high chance that the observer was the same individual who made Kim Hyun-Sung return to the past. When I pledged my loyalty to Kim Hyun-Sung, the seal on Mind’s Eye shattered, and it explained why the system expressed that it didn’t want Park Deok-Gu to fall behind. I was sure that our lovely regressor and I were being guided by a transcendent being.

‘Lucky! Lucky! Yolo!’

I was suspicious about one thing, though…

‘Is it really okay for them to intervene directly?’

I could only shake my head at the answer. If this happened every day, then the situation wouldn’t have turned out this badly. Basically, the transcendent being was likely overdoing it by sending a quest like this. Anyway, regardless of the reason, it was still true that we had received a sweet Legendary-Ranked Quest and naturally, we would receive a sweet gift in exchange for completing it.

I had no choice but to hold Jung Ha-Yan’s hand while she was casting a spell, and she revealed a look of surprise in response to my actions. She was definitely happy about what I did because she was smiling, and it was understandable for her to be happy about it since I had just proposed to her and was now showing my affection

physically. My heart skipped a beat when I saw her innocent smile and the voice of the system I heard afterward made me even happier.

[You have completed the Legendary-Ranked Quest.]

[Grab the hand of the human blessed by mana. (1/1)]

[A new job has been unlocked as a Quest reward. Please select the job you think you will need.]

[Job]

[Alchemist of Light - Semi-Mythic Rank]

[Only those chosen by a god can become the Alchemist of Light. Your magic will be imbued with holy power. Magic will increase by 5 points. You're just a piece of shit. You disgusting bastard. You're a really hopeless piece of shit. Seriously.]

'S-Semi! Mythic rank! Y-Yoho!'

My eyes instantly widened and honestly, I didn't even read the profanity written at the end of its description. It was sad that my magic only increased by five points, but this was better than nothing. I didn't know what changed, but the noticeable part was that the color of my mana had changed. It became brilliant gold in color.

"*Ahhhhhhhhh!*"

'Hang in there! The reason for our existence! Jung Ha-Yan!'

When I grabbed her hand, the light started to envelop Jung Ha-Yan. I wasn't sure whether it was because of my influence or simply because I had grabbed her hand, but the color of her mana changed, and a brilliant golden light started filling up the city. It was extremely bright that I couldn't open my eyes properly.

Actually, I was still telepathically talking to Belial, so I couldn't really see the light properly, and even though the quest was important, my contract with the demon was important as well.

'Is it okay if we stop it? I-It wasn't in the contract… '

[It doesn't matter. However, keep in mind that you can come to this side whenever you want, you disgusting human. Despite being enveloped by the light, that sickening side won't go anywhere, which makes me want you even more. How can a mere human be this dirty… I think I know why she doesn't want to send you away, even if it means sacrificing herself.]

'By her, do you mean… '

[The other being who has been trying to talk to you, human. Anyway, remember, you disgusting human. If you desperately want it… you can join us anytime…]

[A Forced Epic Quest has been activated. Don't talk to the Demon Lord, you piece of shit. (0/1)]

'Shouldn't this much be okay… '

[I repeat, do not talk to the Demon Lord. (0/1)]

[*Ahem*. Well, I think it should be fine if I take my leave. I'll end this. Have fun struggling, disgusting human. We'll end our conversation here.]

I couldn't understand what was going on, but one thing I was sure of was that during all of this, Jung Ha-Yan was doing her best to stop the dark red orb before her. The way she bit her lips and kept grunting made her look desperate.

'I'm sure she can stop it… '

I thought about giving her my weak mana, but all my mana could do was envelop her in light. Actually, I think it was helping because the brilliant golden light was steadily getting rid of Belial's energy.

"*Eeeeeeeek! Eeeeeeeek!*"

It was ironic how Jung Ha-Yan was trying to stop the dark red orb when she was just trying to destroy the city earlier, but life was just like that.

'I think she can stop this… '

I wasn't sure if Belial was retrieving its magic, but when my mana spun around Jung Ha-Yan's body once more, she seemed to become more energetic. It was weak, but I recalled the description that said my magic would be imbued with holy power. Still, I had to find out more about this *'Semi-Mythic rank*' job. Despite my help, blood was flowing out from Jung Ha-Yan's nose, and I was slowly losing my strength as well.

Obviously, this scene was too powerful for us to be the only ones to witness it, so when I glanced at Han Sora, she had to have come to a realization despite being tired. I mumbled to her to send it out, and she nodded in response. A scene like this wouldn't require any editing. It was unfortunate that we couldn't prepare ahead of time, but the scene started playing in the few regions covered by the magic hologram. I was sure this scene could be seen in Lindel and in the entire Sacred Democratic Country as well.

'We should have installed one as soon as we arrived in Laios… '

Once the magic hologram started playing, I was sure the guild members of the Red Mercenary Guild and the Yozora Guild would install goddess' mirrors in the overpopulated areas, so it wasn't really that much of a big deal.

"I-I'm ready…" Han Sora said.

"Okay, send the signal," I ordered.

"Alright, Sub Guild Master."

While Park Deok-Gu was protecting us, the broadcast started playing throughout the continent.

"*Ahhhhhhhh!*"

I started smiling after thinking about the people who would witness Jung Ha-Yan and me being enveloped in light.

“The light will not lose, you demon!” I yelled.

- *Mwahaha!* Come at me if you dare! You insignificant human! Jin Cheong, break the rest of the seal! I’ll make this incompetent mortal realize the true meaning of fear. What are you doing, Jin Cheong?! Break this seal! I’ll give you what you want. I’ll give you the world! I’ll make you enjoy all sorts of wealth and glory!

The demon was playing along, and Jin Cheong’s face turned pale, unable to do anything. I guarantee that even if Zhuge Liang’s army came, he wouldn’t be able to resolve this situation.

“The light will burn the demon! Everyone! Send us your strength. Send it to us so that we can stop this wicked demon!” I yelled.

“You’re nothing but a demon! How dare youuuuuu!!!” I screamed once more.

[I told you not to talk to the Demon Lord. (0/1)]

There was a dissatisfied being somewhere, but it surely couldn’t deny the fact that the quarrel between Demon Lord Belial and me was near perfect.

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1. Pristina’s POV, but in third person pov ☜

2. Lee Ki-Young’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 322
THE HERO OF LAIOS (1)

While the dark red orb was falling on the city, All I[1] could do was watch. I couldn't quite figure out what was going on. Of course, I knew something big was happening because I heard screams from everywhere.

"Go underground, everyone! I repeat. Go to the underground shelter, everyone! This is real, and it's not a drill. Enter the nearby designated building covered by shield magic. I repeat. Go to the underground shelter or to a designated building covered by shield magic and wait!"

"*Kyaaaaaah!*"

"Oh god, oh god…"

"What are you doing, Marina? Didn't you hear the announcement? Hurry up."

The voice beside me helped me come back to my senses. I realized that the surreal scenery was real, and I started to feel dizzy.

'Leah.'

I remembered my daughter who was left alone at home.

'Please… God. Please.'

I heard a voice from behind calling my name, but I couldn't stop muttering, and I started running as fast as I could. I was already out of breath, yet it felt like I wasn't even halfway there. In addition, there were people running in the opposite direction, so I was still far from my destination. I was sure everyone was heading toward a shelter or a place being protected by shield magic.

'I shouldn't have left her alone… I shouldn't have…!'

"Marina!" James called out.

“Let me go! Let me go!” I yelled.

“Let’s head to the shelter for now. I’m sure Leah is headed there, too. Hurry—”

“I told you to let me go. Please. Let me go. Please… I need to at least check. I need to see if she got out safely!” I screamed.

“Shit. Wait here,” he said.

“James?”

“I’ll be back as soon as possible, so wait here. Actually, go somewhere safe,” he told me.

“*Ah*…”

I saw James quickly running in the opposite direction. I wanted to go with him, but I couldn’t move my legs. I had to be really scared because no matter how much I tried, my legs weren’t moving. The only thing I could do was pray.

“Please be safe… I pray that the two people whom I love, Leah and James, will be safe… I beg you. Please.”

I didn’t wait long, but it felt like I waited hours. The anxiety made me cry as my chin and legs started trembling. The dark red orb falling steadily on the city looked as if it would swallow everything as it was being sucked into the earth. I still had a little bit of hope, and when it was about to disappear, I saw James running with Leah from afar.

However, just as I was about to call out to them…

Booooooooom!!

The dark red orb struck the clock tower, and the loud sound hurt my ears.

“It’s dangerous, James!” I yelled.

I looked at the sky and saw debris from the large clock tower falling to the ground. I also saw James tightly hugging Leah. I didn’t even want to imagine them being buried under the rubble, but it happened in reality.

I wanted to scream, but my voice wouldn't come out. I felt as though I was frozen and time had stopped.

"N-No!" I yelled.

I couldn't bear to see it with my own eyes, but when I shut my eyes and started crying, I heard my daughter's faint voice.

"Mom… mom…"

'What… '

It was incomprehensible. I slowly opened my eyes, and I saw the city being enveloped in light. The debris from the clock tower was surrounded by light and was slowly being moved away. The light was a brilliant light. I couldn't describe it in any other way. Leah cautiously pulled the edge of my clothes and James was also looking at the sky.

'They helped… '

My prayer reached the gods.

"It's a miracle, a miracle. Thank you, God. Thank you very much. Leah… Leah!"

"No, it's not a miracle, Marina," James said.

"What?"

"It's not a miracle… it's… not…" he repeated.

I held Leah and looked in the same direction James was looking, and what I saw was a horrendous sight.

- Hyung-nim! Hyung-nim! Hold on a bit longer. Just a little! Just a little bit longer!

- *Aaaahhhh!!*

- You dirty bastards! Shit, shit! Hyung-nim! Help will come if you hang on just a little bit more! Don't overdo it and die. Got it? I warned you. I won't forgive you if you overdo it and fall. I won't…!

I couldn't comprehend the sight in front of me, but it made it difficult for me to speak.

"James… that's…"

"I don't know what's going on either, Marina. But… I think the people from the Sacred Democratic Country are fighting the demon and this light enveloping the city was created by them as well. The goddess' mirror… I have heard of it, but I never thought I would see one here," James explained.

"They look like they're in danger…"

The battle looked like it was a close one. The man with a large frame was swinging his sword and shield while being surrounded by many demons, and he was doing his best to protect those behind him rather than thinking about his safety. Monsters of all shapes and sizes were taken down with either a hit from his shield or a slash from his sword, but since there were so many monsters, his entire body was covered in blood. I couldn't understand how he could still move in that condition. Moreover, when the monsters started closing in on them, he even used his body to block their attacks. Even though his arm was being bitten off and he was limping, he didn't hesitate to use his body to protect his comrades in the corner.

- Just hang on a bit longer. Just a bit. This time… this time, I'll make sure to rescue you unharmed. The same thing that happened before won't happen again!

- *Aaahhh!!!*

- I won't let it end like it did last time. I won't stand here helplessly! I won't stand here and look like an idiot! You dirty bastards! You won't get anywhere near my hyung-nim. Bastards… you bastards! Over here. Come over here!

I didn't know what their story was, but I knew the tears in his eyes weren't caused by the pain throughout his body. He was crying because he was nervous about losing the people close to him, and he was afraid that they might be in more pain than him.

The man holding the shield looked like he had a lot of injuries, but the black-haired woman beside him also didn't look normal. I didn't know why, but she was hurling magic at the approaching enemies with her skinny hand while limping. Her condition seemed critical, and she looked as if she couldn't even walk properly. Her entire body looked horrible as if a demon had gnawed at her. Her skin looked dry as

well and was bursting like bubbles.

- *Pant, pant. Sigh*… Let's hold out just a bit more. A little bit more. We're almost there. Hold on a bit longer. I can't die yet. You can do it, Sora. Don't fall no matter what. I can keep going.

Of course, I didn't know what kind of power they were using, but I knew that the woman who was talking to herself had already reached her limits. Using her exhausted body, she was doing her best to protect the people inside the barrier.

- Hyung-nim, hyung-nim!

- It's working. Everything is going great.

I also saw the man and the woman the two were desperately protecting. The man and woman pair stretched their hands toward the sky while holding hands and everyone knew they were the ones protecting the city from the dark red orbs because the brilliant light surrounding the city enveloped their bodies as well.

- *Aaaahhh!!!*

The woman was still maintaining the shield of light despite coughing up blood.

- *Aaaahhh!!!*

The man emitted light while holding onto his chest. He looked fine on the outside, but his legs were shaking and based on what the man with the shield was saying, the situation was critical.

- Don't overdo it. I won't forgive you if you die like this! If you two die first… *Kugh*… I really won't forgive you! I'm going to die, too!

- *Aaaahhh!!!*

- If it's difficult, you can stop… no one will… *Kgh*… blame you or noonim. No one will be able to blame you. You've already done your part. *Kgh*… you did enough.

- Concentrate, Deok-Gu. Focus. *Cough*.

- H-Hyung-nim.

The man started coughing up blood as well.

- Don't look back and focus! I'm okay. I'm fine.

- *Aaaahhhh!!!*

The woman was trying her best to maintain the spell while still coughing up blood.

- Don't die… I beg you. Please… please… god. God. Buddha. Goddess of Benigoa. Please. Save hyung-nim and noonim. Please… if you're there… *Kgh*… please. Don't take our nice hyung-nim and noonim. They've been living their whole life like this. Don't take them away because of this! Don't you think it'll be unfair if they died because of this? It'll be unfair!!

- *Aaaahhhh!!!*

- I'll die in their place. Take me instead. If you… if you have to take someone, take me. *Kgh*…

- *Aaaahhhhh!!!*

The light wasn't fading, and even though the large young man had told them that they could stop, the light surrounding the city wasn't fading in the slightest.

"A-Aren't they in danger? Those people… James, aren't they in danger?" I asked.

"They might die…" James replied.

"What?"

"No… they reached their limits a long time ago. I'm sure they're using every bit of mana in their bodies. I'm just a low-ranked mercenary who only kills goblins, but I know that much. This isn't a type of magic a human can manifest. Even if… even if they manage to protect this city, the two who manifested this magic… will die," he explained.

"How could they do…" I paused.

"I don't know either. People like me will live our entire lives being unable to understand people like them," he responded.

I couldn't understand what was going on, but I started crying because I empathized with the large man who kept yelling.

'Please… '

When I looked to the side, I saw my daughter holding her hands together, and she looked up while pulling my clothes as if suggesting that we should pray. Naturally, I raised my hands toward the sky and closed my eyes.

'Let them be safe… Please don't let these wonderful people die unfairly… '

I was sure it was a coincidence, but the sight I saw afterward could only be described as a miracle.

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1. Marina's POV ☜

CHAPTER 323
THE HEROES OF LAIOS (2)

'You did well! It was perfect, Deok-Gu! I feel bad, but you carried!'

No matter how realistic one's acting was, it wouldn't be as realistic as someone's actual emotions, and if a movie were made out of this, then Park Deok-Gu could even receive the Best Supporting Actor award. The way he frantically ran around and cried while trying to protect his comrades showed his desperation. It kind of broke my heart to see him covered in blood, but since he was strong, I was sure he would recover in a few days. The problem was actually with Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora.

'Me as well… '

I tried to hold it in, but I kept coughing up blood, and it was bound to happen since I was trying to support Jung Ha-Yan with the little mana I had left. To be honest, if I hadn't changed my job to Alchemist of Light, Jung Ha-Yan would have been in a mess as well. The mana I was sharing with her was healing her, so she was able to endure it all this time. If I were to exaggerate a bit, in addition to exhausting her mana, she was now basically exhausting her vitality. Her affinity with magic helped her recover mana while exhausting it, but if it wasn't for my holy power, her insides would have long been destroyed, and she would have been forced to retire as a mage.

'Before that… '

If Belial weren't sealed, I was sure it would have done more than let orbs fall on the city. Anyway, the important part was that Jung Ha-Yan and I were doing great at stopping the magic of the demon Jin Cheong had summoned. I didn't know anything about black magic, but I knew that the time Demon Lord Belial could spend in the real world was running out, so it was about time to end this. When I glanced over at Belial, it lightly nodded.

"Hyung-nim, don't overdo it. Just hold on a bit longer…" Park Deok-Gu muttered.

Park Deok-Gu looked glorious as he continued swinging his shield while crying.

Anyway, while Jung Ha-Yan and I were being enveloped by the light, Jin Cheong looked at us as if all this were ridiculous. He wasn't even thinking about getting rid of us. After all, the plan was basically completed the moment the magic hologram revealed our figures doing our best to save the city from the demon. He definitely wanted the demon to attack, but Belial had just used the darkness to attack the city, so it couldn't cast an offensive spell right away. The strange monsters protecting Jin Cheong's party started running away, so they suddenly found themselves in an awkward position. And Belial kept on shouting Jin Cheong's name all the while.

- Jin Cheong, it's still not enough. Not enough! Don't lose to the light, Jin Cheong!

"Shit. Shit…"

We both knew it was time to end this. The cave that was no longer a cave due to the hole in the sky started to crumble slowly. Everything that I was afraid of becoming evidence was enveloped in a ball of light and exploded. This location, created by Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora, disappeared without a trace. The demons persistently tormenting Park Deok-Gu disappeared due to the influence of the light and the ground we were standing on sank. Maybe it was because of the influence of the mana, but my body floated a bit and the light removed the dark veil.

Whooooooooooooosh!

The sound was difficult for me to describe.

'Warriors of Light. That's what we are.'

"*Aaaahhh!!*"

When I poured my remaining mana into Jung Ha-Yan, she increased her output and the dark red mana covering the sky started to split because of the shield of light.

'What a sight… '

The way the brilliant golden light swallowed the darkness reminded me of a beautiful scene from mythology. At this point, I was sure people were praying while looking at this sight. I wasn't sure what it was like in Laios, but I was sure the Sacred Democratic Country was cheering and telling us not to give up.

'It's because of all of you that we were able to win!'

Naturally, I started thinking about the lines I would say to the people later.

When the brilliant golden light decorating the sky started swallowing more and more dark red orbs, Jung Ha-Yan grabbed my hand and yelled once more. I wasn't really yelling, but I decided to play along.

"*Aaahhhhhhh!*"

"*Aaaahhhhhhhhh!*"

Belial definitely realized that it was the end because it showed us its final act and expressed its sadness.

- How… dare you! Do you really think you'd be able to defeat this Demon Lord?! Jin Cheong, give me your remaining powers!

We did a close-up on the demon summoner's shocked face, and we did a close-up on the attack that would help him gain power. The way Han Sora passionately worked the camera and changed scenes seemed like she was a natural at this job.

- *Ugh*… you dogs of dirty light. Shit… Shit! Shit!! A mere human!!

"*Aaaahhhh!*"

"*Aaaahhhhhh!*"

Belial's final performance was strong, and it seemed like it was about to unleash the final vestiges of its power. I pushed my body to the limits while holding Jung Ha-Yan's hand.

"*Aaaaahhhhhh!*"

And then, it was quiet. An explosive light decorated the sky afterward.

Whooooooooooosh!

I couldn't open my eyes properly, but when I could finally open my eyes again, I saw that the dark red orbs had disappeared. It was replaced by specks of dust made out of light falling on Laios.

Jung Ha-Yan became weak and Han Sora, who had exceeded her limits a long time ago, coughed up blood and started having a seizure. Park Deok-Gu held up his shield in case Jin Cheong attacked us. I thought about passing out as well, but I felt like I had to stand up a bit longer until the situation earlier was finally handled at the very least.

I had to maintain my guard, but I couldn't stop smiling after hearing the loud cheer within the city. The public was completely on my side, and upon hearing their cheers, Belial started to disappear as it uttered its final words.

- Don't think this is the end, human.

Of course, Belial telepathically spoke to me as well.

[Don't take today's incident to heart, you dirty human. Today's incident ended a bit more brilliantly, and as a result, it worked in your favor. The Demon Lord of Lies and Instigation shouldn't get backstabbed, so consider it as a small joke.]

It was kind of extreme for it to be considered a joke, but…

'Of course. Thank you very much for your help, great and honorable Belial. When you have time, I'd like to meet with you separately… '

[*Ugh*… I want you even more.]

'I'm looking forward to the day of our meeting, Belial. Yes, I am… '

[An Epic-Ranked Quest has been created. I told you not to talk to the Demon Lord. (0/1)]

[I'll be heading out now. I don't have much time remaining in the real world… Anyway, as you said, I do hope we meet again.]

'Have a good night, Belial.'

- I'll be back. Don't forget, humans. Don't think today will be the last!

The way Belial did its best until the end reminded me of a hardworking CEO and the way it slowly vanished while being enveloped in a brilliant golden light made it look extremely magnificent. During all of this, the way its eyes burned as it glared at the city was enough to instill fear into anyone. I wasn't sure whether I had to thank the demon or not because it had surely obtained some benefits through this incident. The Demon of Lies and Instigation had tricked everyone on the entire continent, so its evaluation could increase.

'That's not what's important, though… '

Jin Cheong, who had no choice but to watch after being cornered by the otherworldly being, was more important right now.

'People should be arriving soon.'

The party of light was on the verge of completely giving out. Park Deok-Gu was doing his best to protect us by holding up his shield, but even he looked uneasy. Compared to him, the party of darkness looked clean, so naturally, it would be dangerous if they attacked us right now. Despite the aftermath, the demon summoner, Jin Cheong, didn't show any signs of mana exhaustion.

'Everything will be over once he's locked up.'

It was then that I heard a group of footsteps. I smiled when Cha Hee-Ra and Kasugano Yuno finally arrived. I could already imagine what would happen. The investigators from the Republic and Jin Cheong's party ran over here in a hurry, but the members of the Republic were like rats in a trap within Laios. As expected, Jin Cheong tried to run away, and if I were in his place, I would want to avoid being investigated in Laios. Just like Ito Sota, those involved with a demon would always run in the end. I couldn't help but laugh when I thought that this was the end of the cursed darkness that had turned its back on the light.

"The demon summoner is running away! Jin Cheong is running away! *Haha*. The demon summoner is running away!" I yelled.

All of a sudden, I coughed up blood…

"*Huh?*"

I started to feel dizzy, and the voices around me became distant. My mind went blank

as I heard a beeping sound, and my body felt as if it was glitching because it didn't move the way I wanted it to move.

"*Huuuh?*"

I wiped my nose and saw blood.

"Shit… don't… lose… the demo… summ… er…"

I wasn't in pain, but I couldn't speak properly.

'I hope I don't die like this.'

This was the result of overusing my mana, and I was sure I would recover after resting for a few days.

"H-Hyung-nim! Hyung-nim! Hyung-nim!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

Park Deok-Gu's crying face looked blurry in my eyes.

"Ha-Yan… Han… Sora… take care of them. Leave… Kasugano Yuno…"

"I got it. Don't worry. I got it, so stop talking!" Park Deok-Gu replied.

"The demon summoner… catch him…" I continued.

In addition to his voice, I heard Cha Hee-Ra and Kasugano Yuno's voices as well.

"Master… wake… up…" Yuno said.

"Are you okay? Darling? Are you… okay?" Cha Hee-Ra asked.

I kept hearing the beeping sound. I was really at my limits, on the verge of passing out.

'I have to make sure I fall in a certain way… '

Naturally, I grabbed the prayer beads around my neck, and I was sure this would make Father Basel cry. I thought about fainting while standing up, but that was too much. I thought the best position was to act like I was pretending to protect Jung Ha-

Yan because she was a comrade who had been enveloped in the light with me.

'This will work.'

It felt like my surroundings had become a bit noisier, but a few moments later, I couldn't hear the voices anymore.

[You have completed the Legendary-Ranked Quest.]

[Save Laios from danger as soon as possible, you bastard. (1/1)]

CHAPTER 324
THE HERO OF LAIOS (3)

"Guild Master. Guild Master! Miss Ye-Ri, have you seen the guild master?" Ahn Ki-Mo asked.

"I haven't, and I wanted to ask you, Mr. Ki-Mo… Is this really a dangerous situation? For some reason… last time we… the… incident with Mr. Park Deok-Gu…" Kim Ye-Ri replied.

"*Ahem*. I'm sure it's real this time. And you shouldn't think that way, Miss Ye-Ri. Even if the sub guild master… I-is that kind of person, right now…" he stuttered.

"*Ah*, you're right… Sorry, I shouldn't have thought that way. I should be worried first instead of being suspicious of him. It was my fault. The way I have been thinking has been strange lately. It feels like I've been tainted… Anyway, I'm sorry," she apologized.

"I think it's best if you apologize to the sub guild master. By the way, w-what should I do? I can't find the guild master…" he muttered.

"Mr. Ahn Ki-Mo."

"*Ah*, Miss Sun Hee-Young! I'm glad you're here. Have you seen the guild master?" he asked.

"He left first. Right after the video started playing, he left with Dialugia. He'll probably arrive after everything has been handled, though…" Sun Hee-Young replied.

"I see. Did he mention anything else…" he questioned.

"No, but I decided to head to Laios immediately with Miss Hye-Jin. We'll be leaving in an hour," she informed.

"What?"

"We will cancel all the plans the guild has in the meantime, and all parties will head

to Laios. I won't ask for your opinion. That's all," she answered.

"Alright, I understand. I'll tell Miss Ah-Young and Mr. Chang-Ryeol," I told her.

"That would be great," she said.

"…"

"…"

"Miss Sun Hee-Young…" Ahn Ki-Mo called out.

"Yes?"

"Don't worry too much. I'm sure the sub guild master is safe," he said.

"T-Thank you."

* * *

"Your Holiness…"

"You useless fools! You incompetent fools!" Father Basel yelled.

"W-We apologize…"

"Lee Ki-Young… Has Father Lee Ki-Young not woken up yet? Still… why… why! The situation turned this badly! What were the Holy Knights doing all this time?! And what were the Templars doing?!" he yelled again.

"The Templars still h-hasn't received a signal, a-and the safety of the other cardinals and Your Holiness was the priority, so… we had no choice but to remain here."

"So you're telling me that you just stood still while Father Lee Ki-Young fought until he couldn't stay awake anymore?! You idiots! You just stood and watched until the situation became worse?! You idiots! You stupid fools!" he screamed.

"Your Holiness…"

"Quiet! You useless idiots! While all of you were having a discussion, Father Lee Ki-

Young was fighting the demon on his own. He was fighting the darkness without anyone knowing. If he dies, you'll pay for this. No! I'll! Go there myself. I'll stay by his side until he wakes up!" he announced.

"You must remain in your position, Your Holiness. I'm certain Father Lee Ki-Young wouldn't want you to leave your post. Even if you ride a griffon, it'll take a few days for you to arrive there. I'm sure he's safe. I'm certain of it…"

"No. In that case… bring him here…" he suggested.

"I heard he must rest as much as possible. W-We're also very sad that he's… in Laios right now. But even if he were here, I'm certain he would say that he wants you to stay here."

"…"

"…"

"Yes… you're right. All of you are right. Sister Jessica is right. I'm sure he wouldn't want me to leave my post because he's that kind of a person. For the others and for the Goddess of Benigoa, he has been living for them," he said calmly.

"…"

"I hope he's safe… I hope… Goddess of Benigoa. Please don't abandon your loyal servant. Please… this old servant will pray to you once more. Please…" he begged.

* * *

"I'll go to Laios myself," Oscar announced.

"What?"

"I said I'm going to Laios myself," she repeated.

"Miss Oscar…"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young is fighting by himself. I can't just stand by without doing anything. He sacrificed everything for the Country—no, for the continent. I won't let him sacrifice himself this time, too. I understand how all of you are feeling, and I know

that I shouldn't leave my post. But… But I'd like to take care of this situation myself. Laios brought up the discussion about becoming allies first, and I can't let Mr. Lee Ki-Young handle everything that will happen afterward. Since he worked hard for the Country and for the continent, I also have to take risks myself. Prepare the delegation. I'll visit Laios myself," she ordered.

"M-Miss Oscar…"

"Please…" she added.

"We'll make the preparations as fast as possible."

"Senator Caitlyn…" she greeted.

"I'll make an official support request to the foreigners. I heard that the Blue Guild and the Vatican are getting involved in this as well. I'll make plans so that you can meet with Queen Pristina as soon as possible. I'll do my best so that we can resolve this as soon as possible," Caitlyn offered.

"Thank you, Senator Caitlyn. Mr. Lee Ki-Young, please… please stay alive. Just stay alive…" she begged.

"I'm sure he's fine. He'll wake up as if nothing even happened. I'm sure of it," Caitlyn assured her.

* * *

"I'm really annoyed," Lee Ji-Hye complained.

"It's because of your secret lover, right? Are you worried about him?" the girl asked.

"Worried, my ass. I'm sure he's unharmed. He's probably up by now and is dancing away, so what's there to worry about? Actually, maybe that's not what he's doing. If he hears that they lost that demon summoner or whatever, I'm sure he would be angry. Anyway, I'm not worried at all. The news about him still unconscious is just for show, and I'm sure of it," Lee Ji-Hye answered.

"Your expression says otherwise, though." The girl pointed out.

"Do I really look that worried?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“It’s written all over your face. Your face is different from usual, and why are you even biting your nails?” the girl asked.

“When was I biting my nails? You’re hilarious. Are you going to keep talking back? Have you done everything I asked you to do? Are you staying here because you’re done with all of your tasks?” Lee Ji-Hye questioned.

“N-No, I haven’t…” she stuttered.

“But why isn’t he answering? If he’s up, he should at least tell me that he’s doing okay. I’m so annoyed,” Lee Ji-Hye complained.

“You’re worried…”

“You!” Lee Ji-Hye yelled.

“Just go visit him. I’m sure he’ll like it if you visit him. I understand that it’s not charming at all if you’re too clingy, but if the person you love is in the hospital, so you should at least visit him. There are a lot of strange rivals around you as well. Didn’t you see him falling down while holding hands with that mage at the end? Seeing that he hasn’t been answering, maybe he’s waiting for you to come,” the girl explained.

“He’s not that kind of person…” Lee Ji-Hye muttered.

“But still—”

“Still… it won’t be bad to visit him. It’s not like I’m listening to you or anything. I don’t have anything else to do, so why not I visit him? I’m sure important things will happen in Laios from now on, so I should go there as soon as possible. I want to know what happened as well, so let’s go right now…” Lee Ji-Hye suggested.

“What?” asked the girl, dumbfounded.

“Let’s go now. If we borrow the griffon from Yeon-Joo unnie, we’ll get there sooner or later. Let’s go,” said Lee Ji-Hye.

“But I’m not prepared…” she told Lee Ji-Hye.

“If there’s something you need, you can buy it when we arrive there. Let’s go. Hurry up,” Lee Ji-Hye urged.

"*Ah*… okay… Ji-Hye unnie."

* * *

"Thank you," Pristina said.

"There's no need to thank me, Miss Pristina. We came together as a delegation, but even we didn't know—and if it wasn't for the desperate prayers of the denizens of Laios, that kind of miracle wouldn't have happened," Cha Hee-Ra answered.

"No, we just—"

"In the end, no one died. *Haha*," Cha Hee-Ra interrupted.

"I'm sure you're very worried, Miss Cha Hee-Ra," Pristina said.

"I'm sure he's fine. Actually, I'm quite used to it. He's the type to sacrifice himself for others, so there's a lot to worry about by being with him. He would always wake up as if nothing even happened in situations like this, so I'm sure it'll be the same this time as well," Cha Hee-Ra replied.

"I see… So that's the kind of person he is," she mumbled.

"By the way, Miss Pristina. How about telling the people gathered in front of the castle that everything is okay now? I'm sure they all have their lives to live. It has been a few days since they gathered outside, and we're thankful for their gesture, of course. But seeing them out there for a few days without eating anything is making us worried. If some of them ended up having health issues—" she paused.

"No, it's fine, Miss Cha Hee-Ra. Everyone gathered on their own will, and they were the ones who prayed as well. It means that the denizens of Laios are extremely grateful to Father Lee Ki-Young and the other heroes. Everyone was watching through the goddess' mirror. Of course, our feelings can't be compared to what you and the others are feeling, but everyone is praying that Father Lee Ki-Young wakes up soon. I know that God doesn't really intervene when it comes to the events of the real world, but I hope our prayers will reach God," she explained.

"But…"

"You really don't have to worry. The castle will provide support to those who came

here voluntarily. Actually, I'm not sure if the royal family is being helpful. The people themselves have been excitedly sharing their food and giving whatever they have to others. Of course, I can't say it's enough, but… it's probably because they're all touched by Father Lee Ki-Young's sacrifice. I'm sure that even after hundreds of years, the achievements of Father Lee Ki-Young and the other heroes will still be remembered and told in Laios forever. Yes, forever…" Pristina informed.

"It's an honor," Cha Hee-Ra commented.

"No, it's my honor, Miss Cha Hee-Ra. Thank you very, *very* much," said Pristina.

* * *

"Miss Sora…" I called out.

"Yes, Sub Guild Master. Did you call…"

"What's for dinner?" I asked.

"*Ah!* I think we're finally having meat," Han Sora replied.

"What's the occasion…" I asked.

"I think Miss Kasugano Yuno brought it in discreetly. I'm sure it wasn't easy since the castle is completely surrounded by people…" she answered.

"No matter the reason, we can finally have some meat," I said.

"You're right. By the way, Sub Guild Master," she started.

"What is it, Miss Sora?" I asked.

"When are you going to announce that you've woken up? I think there's a lot of people gathered in Laios right now—" she said.

"*Ah!* I think it'll be fine if I lie down for three more days. That way people will be more thankful. It'll be fine if we tell them that I'm on the verge of dying. *Ah*, while we're on the subject, please spread this rumor…" I started.

"What kind of rumor?" she questioned.

“That tonight is crucial, and it’s very likely that I might not make it today… something like that,” I answered.

“*Ah*, okay.”

“It may become noisy outside the castle with the people crying and all, but I think it’ll all be great when I wake up the next day. Anyway, please give me what you brought, Miss Sora. I’ve been lying down for over half a day, so I’m starving,” I told her.

“Sure, Sub Guild Master. And… regarding my… transfer…” Han Sora mentioned.

“As you know, the public is focused on me, so you’ll have to wait a bit longer. Don’t worry too much. After this is over, I’ll assign you to the safest job possible. Wow, this is really delicious. Is this beef plate?” I asked.

“It is!” she answered.

“It’s melting in my mouth. It’s delicious!” I exclaimed.

“You’re right. It’s really delicious. I’m glad. I’m really glad,” she said.

“It tastes even more delicious while I’m looking at the people gathered in front of the castle. It really does feel like it’s melting. I wonder… I wonder if they’ll build a statue of me. *Hahaha*…” I laughed.

CHAPTER 325
THE HERO OF LAIOS (4)

I couldn't help but look outside the castle with satisfaction and joy. Of course, there were some things that made me feel uncomfortable, but the situation was going the way I wanted it to go for the most part. Honestly, it was going better than I expected. I hadn't been able to sleep last night because there were people who gathered outside the castle. It was bothersome to be the hero of a nation, but it was definitely a good thing.

When I peeked outside, I saw that the denizens were still praying for my safety. I was touched because men, women, denizens, and even foreigners had gathered. I was certain that even if Queen Pristina had sustained injuries and were bedridden, this still wouldn't have happened.

'Of course, they should do that for me.'

What they had seen through the goddess' mirror that day was the definition of sacrifice and heroism. The warrior, Park Deok-Gu, protected us with all his might while drenched in blood, while Han Sora kept casting spells with her thin body despite having been exposed to black magic. Jung Ha-Yan and I kept coughing up blood while grasping our chests, and even though we had reached our limits, we were still trying to protect the people of Laios. It was the kind of scene one would usually only see in hero stories.

'It was such a perfect scene.'

I felt proud just thinking about it…

All of a sudden, I heard loud voices from outside. I was sure they had heard the news that I had woken up.

'I heard Hyun-Sung is here, too.'

Along with Park Deok-Gu, who had woken up the fastest, our lovely regressor was the other person desperately waiting for me to wake up. And my heart broke when I

heard how he stayed outside because I had to rest as much as possible.

'Yeah, your hyung understands how you feel.'

I could feel from those ridiculous quests that he was being supported by a transcendent being. Actually, I couldn't really call it *support*, but anyway, a transcendent being was undeniably watching over him. My loyalty to Kim Hyun-Sung carried me this time as well.

'Semi-Mythic rank. Semi-Mythic rank.'

It was really surprising and frustrating that my magic stat had only increased by 5 points despite the rank upgrade, but it was unusual that my job's rank was Semi-Mythic. In addition, I had even obtained access to holy power, so I had become the only person who could use both holy power and magic in the Sacred Democratic Country—no, on the entire continent. I had been kind of shocked at the time, but when I thought about how this transcendent being didn't want Jung Ha-Yan to die, I nodded. If I had been unable to heal Jung Ha-Yan back then, there was no way she could have walked around right now. In fact, she could have even died.

'They think that Jung Ha-Yan is important as well.'

After analyzing what happened, the transcendent being watching everything from above didn't want to lose both Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Ha-Yan. This could be the reason Kim Hyun-Sung had no choice but to return. If there was actually an invisible threat, it would sense that they wanted to ensure Jung Ha-Yan's safety. Even in her current condition, Jung Ha-Yan could still be considered a monster—a monster who still had room to grow. In the face of this invisible threat, I didn't want Jung Ha-Yan to be absent.

We had obtained various buffs during the ordeal, but stopping a large-scale attack on an entire city was still an incomprehensible achievement by ordinary people's standards.

[Alchemist of Light - Semi-Mythic Rank]

[Only those chosen by a god can become the Alchemist of Light. Your magic will be imbued with holy power. Magic will increase by 5 points. You're just a piece of shit.

You disgusting bastard. You're a really hopeless piece of shit. Seriously.]

'I feel like I'm the only one the system doesn't like… '

However, it didn't really matter, because I was still profiting from the people around me.

Anyway, it was time to greet the guests. Many guests from the Sacred Democratic Country, the Vatican, and Laios were waiting for their heroes.

When I glanced to the side, I saw Jung Ha-Yan, who had woken up not too long ago. She had to spend her time inside Kasugano Yuno's barrier, and Han Sora was being wary of Jung Ha-Yan. Having to share one room with three people would be really fun for some, but it would be like hell for others. Unlike Han Sora, who had somewhat recovered, Jung Ha-Yan still looked pale, which worried me. Overusing her mana would have side effects no matter how much of my Semi-Mythic magic I used, even if her magic stat was 99 points. However, she didn't look all that bad. Just like how I enjoyed the people of Laios being worried about me, Jung Ha-Yan also looked as if she enjoyed seeing me being worried about her.

'We're starting to resemble each other.'

I saw that she was treating the ring on her left hand as if it were priceless, and it made it seem like she gained more than she lost.

"Are you okay, Ha-Yan?" I asked.

"Yes, oppa. I still can't use my magic yet, but… t-there aren't any issues. I'm fine. *Cough, cough*. I'm really okay. You don't have to… *Cough*… worry," Jung Ha-Yan answered.

I knew her coughs weren't real, but as someone who knew about Jung Ha-Yan's physical condition very well, I couldn't help but be worried.

"Are you really okay?" I asked again.

"Yes, I'm really fine. *Ugh*… I'm really okay, so don't… *Cough*…" she coughed.

To make things worse, she held onto her chest.

"*Cough, cough*. I-I'm sorry. I'm actually not okay. *Cough*. I think I'll feel better if you pat me a bit, O-Oppa. You know, that spell," she requested.

"*Ah*… yeah," I answered.

"My chest really hurts. *Cough*. My chest… my chest is in a lot of pain," she added.

"Okay…"

"It really hurts. O-O-Oppa…" she stuttered.

She finally had a reasonable excuse, and Jung Ha-Yan knew that my magic contained holy power as well. After she woke up, I poured my mana into her dozens of times, but she discreetly revealed her chest as if she was still hungry for it. When I lightly placed my hand on her chest, she flinched in a cute way.

"*Heuk*…"

Jung Ha-Yan made a strange noise for a moment, but I had no choice but to pour my mana into her for now. Since we had to greet our guests soon, it wasn't a bad idea to give her some of my mana right now.

"M-More to the left. Not in the center… T-The area where my heart is… it's in pain. Please use your mana there. My heart… my heart is in a lot of pain," she requested.

"Are you feeling better?" I asked.

"*Heuk*… No, just a little more… just a little bit more. T-The center of my heart is in pain. *Cough*. *Ugggggh*… *Heuk*. The center part hurts…" she muttered.

I didn't really understand what she meant by the *center of her heart*, but her face turned red, and I couldn't tell if she was in pain or if she found it pleasurable. This happened all of a sudden, and Han Sora looked like she didn't know what to do. I was embarrassed as well, so we tried not to make any eye contact.

Fortunately, a voice suddenly echoed from outside. In some ways, that person saved both Han Sora and me. Jung Ha-Yan looked at me with disappointment, but I couldn't keep playing along with her childishness anymore.

“I’ll do the rest later,” I told her.

“Okay…”

Jung Ha-Yan looked sad, but at the same time, she looked as if she needed to control herself. I couldn’t say that she had matured just yet, but she did seem more relaxed. However, this could be the influence of what I had just said.

After cleaning the sheets, I got up halfway, and perhaps it was because Jung Ha-Yan had taken some of my mana, but I looked kind of pale. Jung Ha-Yan looked pale from the beginning and Han Sora, whose rate of recovery was slow, looked uneasy.

When I heard Park Deok-Gu’s voice outside, I felt kind of bad. Fortunately, everything had worked out in the end, and the guilt I felt toward him was starting to disappear.

When I looked at the girls once more, the door opened. The partial barrier that had been covering the room disappeared, and a few people quickly ran inside.

“H-Hyung-nim! Hyung-nim!” Park Deok-Gu called out.

I heard Park Deok-Gu’s voice first, but Aris—no, the figure whose name was now Oscar, caught my attention first.

“Father Lee Ki-Young!”

I was really shocked when Oscar ran into my arms. I knew she was worried about me, but I immediately noticed an indescribable emotion welling from inside her.

“*Heuk*… *heuuuuk*… A-Are you okay?” Oscar asked.

“Yes, I’m fine,” I answered.

“Are you hurt anywhere? How… *Heuk*. Do you know who I am?” she questioned.

“Of course, Miss Oscar. You didn’t have to come all the way here… But it looks like I made you worry,” I said.

“*Heuuuuk*…”

Oscar couldn’t hold back her tears. As the leader of a country, I had thought she

would display a dignified behavior somewhat, but it seemed that she really was finding it hard to hide her anxiety. It made me happy, but naturally, I was worried about Jung Ha-Yan because Oscar had completely buried her face into my chest. When I lifted my head slightly, Jung Ha-Yan definitely looked displeased, but she decided to remain quiet for now.

'Wait… '

She had a completely different expression.

'How should I describe it… '

When I realized that she had a look of superiority, Jung Ha-Yan snorted and touched the ring on her left hand. In addition, she seemed amused by the situation.

'Is it considered effective… '

I couldn't really say it was effective, but the look of superiority was still there. However, Jung Ha-Yan started to become anxious when Oscar's hug was getting longer than expected, and when I lightly pushed Oscar back, she nodded as if she had expected it. I couldn't help but smile after thinking that the proposal was effective, but the others didn't have to know it for now.

When I looked at each and every one of the people who visited me, I saw people I hadn't seen in a while.

"Hyung-nim. Hyung-niiim… *Kgh*. Are you okay, noonim? Sora, how are you feeling? Are all of you okay?" Park Deok-Gu cried.

"We're fine, Deok-Gu. We're okay. We're feeling kind of out of it, but physically… I think we have completely recovered," I replied.

"Are you sure there's nothing wrong with your body?" he questioned.

"Yes, I'm really okay. My body is perfectly fine. It's the same for the others," I assured him.

Park Deok-Gu's face was covered in tears and snot.

I noticed the guild members who came with him. Sun Hee-Young looked really

relieved, Jo Hye-Jin seemed stupefied, Kim Ye-Ri looked guilty for some reason, and Ahn Ki-Mo was smiling as usual. Yoo Ah-Young and Lee Chang-Ryeol came with them as well.

“I’m relieved, Sub Guild Master. All I can say is that the heavens truly helped…” Sun Hee-Young muttered.

“I agree,” I told her.

I saw Lee Ji-Hye glancing my way from the back of the room, and I couldn’t help but think that she was quite sad about how I didn’t contact her as soon as possible. Lee Ji-Hye then sighed in relief and left the room. She knew her turn would come later.

I started to feel tired after greeting the executives of Laios and the members of the Vatican who came to check on my condition, but I was thankful that they were all worried about me and visited me. Lady Caitlyn—no, Senator Caitlyn and Senator Elise cried as well, and the people I worked hard to connect with cried when they saw that I was awake. Naturally, I eased their anxiety by revealing a weak smile, and that was when I saw a face I hadn't seen in a really long time.

“*Um…*”

“*Ah*.”

“Mr. Ki-Young.”

“Mr. Hyun-Sung!”

It was our lovely regressor, Kim Hyun-Sung.

CHAPTER 326
THE HERO OF LAIOS (5)

"Mr. Ki-Young."

"Mr. Hyun-Sung!"

'This guy… '

We weren't apart for that long, but it felt like it had been a while since I saw seen Kim Hyun-Sung. After thinking about all the trouble I had to go through, I smiled bitterly. In the end, everything worked out, so I was able to smile, but I had been continuously walking on thin ice. No matter how much I thought about it, we got lucky. If even one thing had gone wrong, then we would have had to either run away from Laios or get killed. I was sure Kim Hyun-Sung had to deal with his fair share of troubles, but in the end, I was the one who almost died a few times. While he was taking care of his mental health, I was in a life-and-death situation, and I was sure he knew that very well because he seemed distressed.

'That's right, man. Your hyung was in a lot of pain, and he had gone through some hardships. It was really difficult… Shit. This is all for you, so you can be a little sadder.'

Honestly, I wasn't in a lot of pain, but for some reason, I wanted to express that I was going through a tough time. Kim Hyun-Sung's handsome face looked haggard, and I wasn't sure if I was seeing things, but he looked like he was crying. He wasn't bawling like Park Deok-Gu, but he was definitely worried about me.

'Maybe he's more attached to me than I thought… '

I didn't think Kim Hyun-Sung would be this worried about me. I knew we had a special bond, but I was surprised when I heard that he and Dialugia departed for Laios as soon as the magic hologram was revealed. Moreover, he stood guard outside the room with Park Deok-Gu instead of trying to find the enemy. He chose to be by my side rather than wrap the situation up.

"Mr. Hyun-Sung, it's been a while. *Cough*," I greeted.

I started coughing as well as if Jung Ha-Yan's cough had spread to me. I didn't do it consciously; my body simply did it on its own. In addition, my body actually started hurting. I was pretty sure the saying: *'your body changes based on your thoughts'* was accurate because I felt as if someone were poking my chest with a needle, and it was getting harder for me to breathe.

"Are you okay?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

I wanted to smile since he quickly ran to my side.

I used Mind's Eye to see if his stats had changed and as expected, his stats were amazing.

"I'm fine, Mr. Hyun-Sung. By the way… you didn't need to come all this way…" I told him.

"It's fine. It's only natural that I come here. I was really… really worried. I'm glad you're safe, Mr. Ki-Young. Your health…" he trailed off.

"*Haha. Cough*. I'm fine, really. I heard that my body recovered so fast it seemed like a miracle. Ha-Yan, Deok-Gu, and Miss Sora suffered more than I did… I'm really—*cough*—okay," I answered.

"Are you really okay?" he asked once more.

My coughing definitely worried him. Even though I was saying I was fine, I obviously wasn't fine. I thought that he might retrieve an elixir from his bag, but if something like that existed, I would have used it long ago. Anyway, he stayed by my side as I continued coughing and although the others were worried about me as well, they took a step back and watched us.

"Please… excuse me for this," he said and placed his hand on my chest.

'What's wrong with him? What's he doing?'

Jung Ha-Yan's eyes instantly widened, and the majority of the women watching us started blushing. I even heard people in the back saying things like, '*Oh my… '*

'What's going on?'

I felt even more uncomfortable because I was lying in bed. He lowered himself in case it was difficult for me to raise my body and even though I was surprised for a moment, I knew he wouldn't cause me any harm.

As expected, he started pouring his mana into my body, and although his mana couldn't heal one's body, he was using his mana flowing in me to see if there was anything abnormal with my body. It was a good thing I poured my mana into Jung Ha-Yan earlier because Kim Hyun-Sung definitely felt that I was empty of mana. He looked pretty serious. The only symptom I was showing was being slightly out of breath, but he seemed like he still wanted to check to see if I was experiencing other side effects. Of course, he wasn't a doctor, but after letting his mana flow through my entire body, I actually started to feel comfortable and drowsy.

'I want to sleep.'

I wasn't sure if this was a proper comparison, but I felt like I was getting a massage. It was like his mana was massaging me inside.

'How is this possible?'

This was impossible with my mana, even though it was imbued with holy power. This was advanced operational mana knowledge only strong players on the continent owned as if it was their privilege. However, I was certain that even among those players, not many of them could do this. Without Kim Hyun-Sung's delicate mana control, I definitely wouldn't feel this comfortable.

The strange part was that the room had become extremely quiet. The people around Kim Hyun-Sung and me were focusing on us quietly, and the maids of Laios blushed just as much as Han Sora did when she saw what Jung Ha-Yan and I had done earlier. However, I didn't really think that this was a big deal…

'Shit… '

I started to get worried that people might think that we were gays, and when Kim Hyun-Sung's mana was finally done flowing through my body, I blushed and suddenly exclaimed. Obviously, my actions were all thanks to the influence of his mana, nothing else, but the atmosphere suddenly started to change in a strange way, even though they came here because they were worried about me.

"I-I'm okay now, Mr. Hyun-Sung…" I stuttered.

I felt like this gathering would lose its original purpose if this continued, so I had no choice but to stop him.

“But…”

“It’s enough. I appreciate the thought, but your mana is pretty strong… so I think it’ll be too much for me to take any more…” I explained.

“In that case, I’ll be more delicate this time…” he offered.

“No, I appreciate the offer…”

I thought it was over, but those listening to our conversation started blushing even more, so I hurriedly added, “Thank you for coming, everyone. Looks like I… caused you unnecessary concerns.”

“That’s not true, Father Lee Ki-young. Thank you *very,* very much. The people of Laios will never forget the sacrifice you and the other heroes have made,” Pristina chimed.

“Thank you, Miss Pristina. However, I can’t say that it’s all because of our contribution. If it weren’t for the prayers of others, we wouldn’t have been able to stop the demon that day. I’m not sure if it was a miracle, but I felt like I heard the voices of many people that day,” I explained.

“*Ah*…”

“There’s no need to thank us excessively. If the others were in our situation, I’m sure they would have done the same thing,” I continued.

When I glanced at Jung Ha-Yan, Han Sora, and Park Deok-Gu, they nodded energetically. However, it seemed that Pristina was still unsatisfied because in addition to expressing her gratitude by tapping on her forehead—a long custom of Laios—she even bowed toward us while crying.

“Thank you very much. Thank you so much,” Pristina said.

“Please raise your head, Miss Pristina. And the same goes for the other members of Laios. It’s embarrassing to me if you keep doing this—*cough*…” I told her.

“Father Lee Ki-Young.”

“Mr. Ki-Young.”

It was amusing how everyone flinched when I coughed. The atmosphere was getting better. The crybaby Park Deok-Gu was energetic once more and Kim Hyun-Sung, who was also crying, seemed relieved. Dialugia looked at me like I was a piece of trash because she knew what was going on. I wasn’t in any kind of life-threatening situation. If something really happened to me physically, she would have noticed it before anyone else, so it was understandable for her to react that way. Once everyone confirmed that Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora were fine, the room became lively, and the people of Laios continued to express their gratitude during all this. Naturally, I brought up the people outside.

“By the way, it seemed kind of noisy outside. Did something happen? Actually, was everything taken care of—”

“For now, I think it’s best for you to focus on recovering, Father Lee Ki-Young.”

“But… that demon summoner Jin Cheong…”

I already knew the truth because Cha Hee-Ra had told me everything that happened. I knew the demon summoner who tried to destroy the city managed to escape Laios, but I had to play dumb because I had to show that I was constantly worried about Laios.

“You must focus on recovering for now,” Pristina suggested.

“But outside—”

“It’s fine, sir. You’re the reason why it’s noisy outside, Father Lee Ki-Young. It’s not because of the demon summoner,” she interrupted.

“What?” I asked.

“It seems that you still haven’t seen it yet,” she said.

“I don’t really understand what you’re saying…”

However, I knew what she was talking about.

Pristina opened the curtains with a light smile, and a cool breeze entered the room when she opened the window. Naturally, I was astonished because I had never seen a sight like this before.

"*Ah…*"

I saw the people of Laios praying, and there were so many of them that I would believe it if they told me that every denizen of the nation had gathered here. It was the most spectacular sight I had ever seen.

At that moment, I slowly got up. I stumbled due to my lack of stamina, but I avoided falling down thanks to Park Deok-Gu. This wasn't a scripted scene, but it wasn't bad. When I waved my hand lightly, the people started to applaud and cheer. Moreover…

'Why are they crying?'

I couldn't help but laugh when I saw the innocent people crying tears of joy.

"*Aaaaahhhh!"*

The scene looked as if there were a festival.

"*Ha… hahaha*," I laughed.

I looked at Pristina as if I couldn't believe it, and she looked at me quietly with a smile.

"Everyone came here of their own volition. They saw the sacrifices you and the other heroes have made, and they have been waiting for you to wake up. Everyone had one mind and one goal," Pristina explained.

"I'm very… grateful for this sight," I commented.

"The square," she mentioned.

"Sorry?"

"If it's alright, I'd like to erect a statue of all of you in the square," she continued.

'Wooow! You've become successful, Ki-Young!'

I simply smiled without saying anything, but Pristina definitely understood it as my acceptance of her offer because a big smile appeared on her face.

“The people of Laios will never forget your sacrifice—never,” she added.

The alliance could basically be considered established by now. Everyone was smiling, and the cheering crowd outside made everyone chuckle. In a situation like this, only one person felt uncomfortable. I glanced behind me and saw Kasugano Yuno being distant while looking down.

‘Kasugano Yuno.’

Her actions didn’t come as a surprise.

‘Because she did something wrong… ’

I didn’t know why, but I couldn’t understand her behavior. She confessed it to me herself, but what she had done was something I couldn’t easily forgive. The others had no idea about it yet, but that dirty demon summoner, Jin Cheong—Kasugano Yuno was the one who helped him escape Laios.

CHAPTER 327
THE HERO OF LAIOS (6)

Everything was handled perfectly, but the way it ended made me feel kind of uncomfortable. Actually, I was more happy than frustrated. In the end, everything had gone the way I wanted it to go, aside from Jin Cheong's escape. The fact that the demon summoner was alive made me feel anxious, and I was sure the people of Laios felt the same. We submitted an official request to the Republic to hand over the demon summoner, Jin Cheong, but we still haven't received a reply. All we heard was that they were going to take a closer look into the situation, but of course, that was just a bullshit excuse. There was nothing they could do about this situation. The location where we confronted the demon had essentially vanished, and all traces were gone aside from a few lights. To make things worse, Laios imposed a travel ban on the members of the Republic.

The only remaining evidence was Ito Sota's conviction and the scenes we filmed that the goddess' mirror had revealed, so it was impossible for them to look even closer into the situation. Unfortunately, the fact that they gave that excuse meant that they were going to protect Jin Cheong.

I knew the Republic wasn't as sensitive to black magic as the Sacred Democratic Country, but this incident was big enough to influence the neutral nation. The foreigners of the Republic perished, and the incident itself could cause international issues. However, the Republic decided to listen to Jin Cheong's story and protect him.

'They say that men are blind in their own cause… '

I wasn't sure what was going on, but I thought Jin Cheong was going to try to explain this situation and frame me for his sins at the same time. I had a lot of evidence with me, so he probably wouldn't try to frame me, but I was sure he was unsatisfied with the fact that his opponent—whom he had a grudge against—was still alive.

Obviously, I was working hard using the media, and although I felt kind of bad for the demon worshiper Ito Sota, his name kept coming up.

"Ito Sota, the demon worshiper and this time, it's Jin Cheong, the demon

summoner…" a member of the Vatican spoke.

"…"

"Do you think the two are related somehow, Father Lee Ki-Young?" they asked.

"It's possible… that they are related. I don't know when they made contact with each other, and I don't know their motives as well. However, it doesn't change the fact that their ultimate goal is the same. Darkness has already taken root deep inside the continent. I knew that groups of black mages had been formed in many different places, but I had never imagined that their influence had already spread so far. It was honestly by chance that we were following Jin Cheong…" I answered.

"So you're saying that the situation is more serious than what the Vatican thinks…" they said.

"That's right. I'm sure they have their own communication methods. Since the Republic is currently protecting Jin Cheong, it's safe to say that the Republic has already been influenced by darkness. To prepare for the worst-case scenario… it's safe to think that… they have been completely tainted…" I continued.

"It's that bad already… *Oh, god…*"

"Think about the Sacred Democratic Country's position. No one knew that Ito Sota was a demon worshiper and no one noticed it even though he had been working in Celia for so long. If Ito Sota had ended up taking over the Sacred Democratic Country, we would have been in a similar position as the Republic right now. The Sacred Democratic Country could have encountered a large threat similar to Laios," I added.

"I don't even want to think about it," they said.

"It's not just the Republic. There could be other countries and cities that have already been influenced by demons. I'm sure of it. I'll write up a report about this incident and—"

"*Ah*! There's no need to do that, Father Lee Ki-Young. I appreciate the thought, but your recovery is the priority right now…" they interrupted.

"What? But…"

“His Holiness told me himself that as soon as you wake up, you’ll definitely try to start working again, so he said that we have to make sure you don’t do anything unreasonable. I understand that you’re concerned about many things, but it’ll be best if you get enough rest in the meantime. We already know how much you think about the Vatican and the Goddess of Benigoa, but the goddess doesn’t want you to jump back in just like this. Your recovery has to come first,” they explained.

“…”

I felt kind of frustrated at how my movements were being limited. I had exaggerated my pain, and it had been really effective and beneficial for me, but the overprotective people around me limited my movements. To be honest, it wasn’t just the Vatican.

“Miss Oscar,” I called out.

“You promised you would call me Aris when it’s just the two of us, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Aris reminded me.

“Right, Miss Aris. It was my mistake. *Haha*,” I laughed.

“How do you find the tea? I should have brought snacks, but I came here in a hurry, so I didn’t have time…” she muttered.

“*Haha*, it’s fine. It has been a while since I drank tea you made for me, so it feels like my body is recovering even faster. By the way, the alliance with the neutral nation…” I trailed off.

“It’s going well. Most of this nation’s people expressed their desire to ally with us—actually, forget what I said. You should focus on recovering, but I ended up talking about work again. I understand how you’re feeling, but you shouldn’t think about anything else other than getting better,” she explained.

“But the situation is—”

“I know you don’t trust us, but we’re doing our best,” she interrupted.

“Miss Aris…”

“We’ll do our best and handle this properly so that it will all work out, so please…” she begged.

“Alright. Since you put it that way…”

The leader of the Sacred Democratic Country—Aris—no, Oscar and even Kim Hyun-Sung started protecting me as if I were a baby. This incident had to have been really shocking because they were acting as if they were ready to give me everything.

“Mr. Hyun-Sung, I should…”

“It’s fine, Mr. Ki-Young. You can lie down a little longer. Miss Hye-Jin and Miss Hee-Young have been taking care of guild-related tasks, and I have been helping out as well. You’ve worked hard, so you can rest now,” he suggested.

Our lovely regressor was looking at me with warm eyes while telling me to rest, but…

‘He has no political skills… ’

I couldn’t help but get worried. Fortunately, the reliable Jo Hye-Jin and Sun Hee-Young were taking care of the tasks related to the current incident, so everything was working out just fine.

It hadn’t been that long since I woke up, but I was already feeling stressed because lying down without doing anything was making me anxious. While I was lying down here, statues honoring the heroes were being built in the square and even the sixth volume of *How the Alchemist and the Genius Swordsman Loves* was released in Laios. The more noticeable the statues became and every time the maids walking around talked about the novel, I became more aware of the passing time. It hadn’t actually been that long since I woke up, but considering that a bestselling novel popular only in the Sacred Democratic Country had gotten released in Laios, I couldn’t say it was a short time.

‘What kind of novel is it anyway? Is it that good?’

I had no idea why, but it was interesting how it was selling like hotcakes.

Anyway, whether it was big or small, anything related to me was slowly changing. I was honestly worried about what kind of move the demon summoner would make, but the Republic was still keeping their silence, and at this point, I had completely lost grasp of the current foreign affairs.

'The Sacred Democratic Country isn't that incompetent.'

I had already set everything up for them, so if they didn't manage to achieve anything despite the situation, it would be best for me to move to a different place for the sake of my future.

'Instead… '

I decided to focus on handling internal issues. To find out more about the Semi-Mythic Alchemist of Light job, I scheduled a research session and started coming up with theories. I had to handle the issue related to our lovely regressor, manage and take care of those similar to Jung Ha-Yan and Cha Hee-Ra, meet with Lee Ji-Hye, and many more. I had many things to handle, so I couldn't just sit and do nothing. Additionally, there was an important task I had to tackle.

"I'm sorry, Master. I'm sorry…" Kasugano Yuno apologized.

Dealing with Kasugano Yuno, who allied with the demon summoner Jin Cheong, was an important issue.

"I have nothing to say about my sins. I knew you wouldn't like it, but I still chose to do it, so please forgive me," she continued.

"…"

"I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. *Heuuuk!* Please don't abandon me. Please don't leave me behind…" she begged.

When I looked at her without saying anything, Kasugano Yuno started crying. I had heard many times the reason she let him go, but I still couldn't help but be dissatisfied because this incident had proven that the future she would see wouldn't always be correct. It wasn't because I had no trust in her. When I fainted, she took care of me in many ways, and she even helped me wrap things up. In addition, she contributed the most to the media, so I couldn't bring myself to hate her.

Lee Ji-Hye had once asked me if I really trusted Kasugano Yuno, but from my point of view, Kasugano Yuno was definitely a useful card. However, considering the fact that she and I didn't have a good relationship in our past life…

'She's not preparing to backstab me, is she?'

It was worth thinking about whether she would backstab me sooner or later or not. In our past life, the piece of shit Lee Ki-Young made Kasugano Yuno's life a living hell, and she knew that very well. She said she was happy, but anyone could tell that it was far from a happy life. Mentally, she *just* wasn't in the right place.

It was highly likely that it wouldn't happen, but as a doubtful person, I couldn't help but be suspicious of her.

'For her to take revenge for what happened in her past life… '

Kasugano Yuno seemed too awkward for such a task, and her life was in my hands as well. Unfortunately, there was a possibility that she would look at me in a different way after seeing the Dark World or what would happen in the near future, so it was difficult for me not to be suspicious of her.

"…"

"I'm sorry, I'm really sorry…" she repeated.

"I think it'll be best if I hear the story again with more details. This time, I hope it'll be a story I can understand," I told her.

"I can't explain the details, but Jin Cheong… I could not allow him to die at that place just like that. Otherwise, Master might… you might…" she trailed off.

"…"

"You might end up in danger," she continued.

The probability of her actually being worried about me was more than half, but there was no guarantee that she didn't have a perfect plan to send me to hell. As a result, the issue was giving me a headache in more ways than one.

CHAPTER 328
US IN THE DARK WORLD (1)

Lee Ji-Hye's comment made me suspicious of Kasugano Yuno.

"I don't really know the relationship you have with her, but think carefully about whether you can really trust her or not. No matter how much you think about it, she had made a bad move by helping the other side in a critical situation, and she didn't help just about anyone—it was even the demon summoner, Jin Cheong. I'm not saying this so that I will have one less rival. I'm genuinely worried. People good at backstabbing others end up being backstabbed in the strangest situation. It's a typical cliche."

Lee Ji-Hye said that after I told her that Kasugano Yuno was the one who let Jin Cheong escape. There wasn't anything wrong with what she said. I couldn't agree with her more about how people who backstab others would easily get backstabbed, but since the matter involved Kasugano Yuno, I had to reconsider her loyalty. Our meeting was quite unnatural, and even though I had a method to ensure my safety from her, I still didn't want to let my guard down. The actual saying was kind of different, but the famous line went something like this: 'if you don't trust them from the start, you won't get backstabbed.'[1]

Kasugano Yuno felt anxious because she knew I was being suspicious of her and as someone who was sensitive about the atmosphere more than others, there was no way she wouldn't catch on to the difference between how I previously looked at her and how I was looking at her right now.

I looked straight ahead while setting a slightly serious mood, and she anxiously spoke again, "You were unconscious at the time, so I couldn't get the chance to explain it. I know it's difficult for you to understand, but please know that… I made that choice for you."

I already knew that, but the problem was that she couldn't even explain what kind of future she had seen. If her explanation were understandable, then I would have nodded in understanding, but…

“I don’t remember anything. I’m sure I had seen the future with my own eyes, but it’s like a thick fog. I can’t remember anything. Really. Please believe me…” she begged.

This was the issue: I wanted to believe that she was telling the truth. Right after I woke up, she directly confessed her sins, and she even said that she would accept any punishment. In addition, the incident was too serious for me to say that she intentionally created all this just to be punished. Before I could even organize my thoughts, Kasugano Yuno visited me every day, begging for my forgiveness, so the chance of her having other plans was close to zero. However…

‘No, there’s no need to doubt her. If I don’t believe her, nothing will get resolved.’

There was a risk, but it was a fact that I wouldn’t be able to resolve this situation if I didn't trust her. Obviously, I still had my doubts, but I had to make a decision based on the possibility that she was speaking the truth.

“Are you sure you saw the future?” I questioned.

“That’s right. It was neither in the Dark World nor in the past. I’m sure of that. What I saw definitely happened in the future, but I think it happens after a long time…” Yuno answered.

“What did you mean by I might up in danger?” I asked.

“I’m not sure how I should explain it. I don’t know if your life will be in danger or if your influence and situation will be in danger… I’m not really sure. After seeing that future with my own eyes, I tried to see it again several times, but I couldn’t see it anymore. I’m really, really sorry…” she replied.

It was ridiculous, but I felt abashed to see her lie flat on the ground.

“Is it possible that the future had changed, and that is why you cannot remember it anymore?” I asked.

“That’s not the case. Just like how the future I told you recently didn’t happen, it doesn’t have anything to do with the fact that I can’t recall it. And please speak casually. I beg you… please speak casually to me. *Heuuuk*…”

Kasugano Yuno seemed really nervous, and she resembled Jung Ha-Yan while she was being like this. I was sure she thought that the way I was speaking respectfully

to her meant that she would no longer be my slave. I often speak in a respectful way when there were other people around, so I didn't think there was a need to change my manner of speaking, but it seemed really important to her.

'Didn't I talk to her respectfully last time?'

I honestly couldn't remember it, but I was sure that unlike back then, I was speaking to her in a respectful way, like how I would speak to a stranger, so I could understand why she was anxious. My manner of speaking wasn't really that important, so even though Kasugano Yuno didn't really like it, I still spoke in a respectful manner. However, her frustrated look was starting to annoy me, so I decided to speak casually.

"Aren't you well aware of the fact that the future can change? The city didn't turn into ruins this time as well…" I pointed out.

"Yes, of course. But… for some reason, I just thought that I had to do it. I got the feeling that I had to send him away from here. I don't know how to explain it, but I'm sure it was the case," she explained.

"Basically, despite knowing what I would feel, you let him go because of your instincts," I said.

"I-It's kind of different from that, but… yes. Probably… Please kill me. *Heuuuuk*…" she cried.

"Honestly, it's not that I can't trust you, but… I still can't understand," I said.

"I'm shocked as well. *Heuk*… I have seen many things in life, but it was the first time I couldn't see things clearly, and I even forgot what I had seen. It felt as if someone else is interfering. Yes, it's like someone is trying to get in my way," she explained.

"An outside interference…" I repeated.

"That's right. This never happened before… Please kill me…" she said.

Kasugano Yuno had been giving me the same excuse, so it was my first time hearing something about an outside interference.

'This… '

I had a hunch.

'Is it the system?'

It was possible. I had concluded that the transcendent being wouldn't directly get involved in the real world, but they could interfere in things like this. If the future Kasugano Yuno had seen was the future the transcendent being didn't want her to see, or if it was a future they didn't want her to know, it would explain why her vision was apparently being blocked by thick fog.

Under the assumption that Kasugano Yuno wouldn't backstab me, it made sense, but I had one question: why was this transcendent being preventing her from remembering the future she had seen? There was a chance that they weren't the system, but I really liked them. They invested a lot in me, and despite the insults, they always gave me hints. The only reason we still had a good relationship with each other was my loyalty to our lovely regressor. Since they were still by my side, it would be strange for me to suddenly change my attitude.

I obtained a Semi-Mythic job, and I could even use holy power now, so the recent achievement we had done was excellent, and we managed to drive the demon away as well. It didn't matter which angle was used to look at it because it wouldn't change the fact that I was the transcendent being's ally.

In hindsight, I came up with two hypotheses. First, there could be more than one transcendent being observing me, and it was actually a pretty convincing hypothesis. Some transcendent beings might believe that I had to play my part, while others might be harboring dislike against me. The reason they didn't want Kasugano Yuno to remember what would happen in the future could be that they didn't want me to prevent that danger. It basically meant that they wanted me to be in danger or even worse, die. The second hypothesis was that the transcendent beings weren't hostile toward me.

'Is it because of Hyun-Sung?'

The system and the transcendent being was helping the protagonist of this world—Kim Hyun-Sung—by raising him with care. They were actually interested in him as well. This was also the reason I received many benefits. If I had started off as Kim Hyun-Sung's enemy, I wouldn't have received so many benefits. The worst-case scenario was that Kasugano Yuno could have seen Kim Hyun-Sung being hostile

toward me, and if I discovered that…

'Would I really backstab Hyun-Sung?'

The transcendent being could be wary of the future where I would backstab our lovely regressor.

'I've grown very fond of him. I'm not such a bad person… '

Well, I couldn't guarantee how I would act if I really were put in that kind of situation.

'It's just an assumption anyway, so I don't need to think too deeply about it.'

It was exciting to think about them, but it was impossible to validate those two hypotheses. The two hypotheses had nothing to do with the demon summoner, Jin Cheong, and even if one of them were true, it wouldn't explain why Kasugano Yuno let the demon summoner go.

When she mentioned that there could have been an outside interference, it was an assumption that got me thinking about it, but it was a fruitless assumption. The puzzle pieces were there, but I couldn't piece them together.

'Could it be related to what happened in the past life?'

I couldn't help but think that I was going overboard, but it wouldn't hurt to look into it more. However…

'The problem is that she can't voluntarily see the future.'

Kasugano Yuno tried it many times, but after the incident involving Park Deok-Gu, she never succeeded in making a connection with me once again. The way she apologized to me every time that happened reminded me of a middle-aged man suffering from erectile dysfunction. She failed every time she tried, and she wasn't asking me out as often anymore after losing her confidence. After all, Kasugano Yuno was afraid of seeing my disappointed and annoyed face.

"The Dark World…"

I was surprised when Kasugano Yuno suddenly spoke. I noticed a sense of urgency.

“I-I’ll try my best. I don’t know if it’ll be helpful, but this time at least, I’ll…”

“You think you can do it?” I asked.

“I’m in a good condition today, so I think I can do it,” she replied.

I revealed a look of anticipation, so when I looked straight ahead, Kasugano Yuno closed her eyes slowly while whimpering. She was doing her best to see the future or the Dark World, but she had to be failing at it because cold sweat was starting to cover her face. Kasugano Yuno looked like she was thinking, *‘What should I do if it doesn’t work this time, too?’*

A connection couldn’t be made nor it could be seen just because she wanted it, but I couldn’t help but get filled with disappointment.

‘She won’t be able to do it this time either.’

I had experienced this kind of situation many times with her, so I could feel it. She struggled and was doing her best, but her expression reminded me of Smartie with her head down. In the end, Kasugano Yuno turned her head toward me with her eyes closed. The desperate look on her face told me that she had to succeed this time no matter what.

“I know it’s a ridiculous request, but…”

“…”

“Well… l-last time you and I made a connection, do you remember how we were connected physically, too?” Kasugano asked.

“I do, but…” I answered.

“The chances are low, but how about we try? Maybe a kiss or actions similar to it will help me make a connection. It’s only an assumption, though…” she suggested.

‘What in the world is she talking about?’

But I nodded for now. I was kind of worried, but I instantly grabbed her hand and kissed her lips lightly. As her face turned red, her mana started to surge. However, the anxiety in her eyes was still there. She still looked like Smartie with her head

down.

'Ah, this is frustrating… '

What she was thinking was obvious.

'What do I do if this doesn't work as well?'

Or…

'He's going to abandon me. If I fail, I'll be abandoned.'

Her confidence was the issue rather than the method. I had been neglecting her for quite a while now, but since this situation was special, I decided to give her back the confidence she had lost.

"I'm sure you'll do well."

"*Ah*…"

"You'll do well this time. Slowly… relax. That's right. Slowly. Just relax and leave your body to me. I'll take care of you," I told her.

There wasn't much I could do, but when I lightly patted her head and aggressively made physical contact with her, she started to respond. Her body start trembling, and she opened and closed her lips like a goldfish.

"*Ahh… ahh…*"

"Don't worry about it. I have never doubted you, Kasugano. I was simply complaining. I'm sure you know how much I cherish you, and I'll do the same this time as well. Don't be in a hurry and just take it slow. It doesn't have to be today. Relax and take it slow. That's right. That's it…" I continued.

I did it just for the sake of trying it, but after whispering sweet words to her, Kasugano Yuno slowly raised her head. She had a steadfast look as if she were about to belch.

I thought that it still wasn't enough, but I screamed immediately after I formed that thought because I suddenly felt like I was being sucked into something.

‘Nice!’

Kasugano Yuno had finally resolved her internal erectile dysfunction.

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1. This was from a game called Closer, and it's the line from a trainer that got turned into a meme ☜

CHAPTER 329
US IN THE DARK WORLD (2)

[Viewing limited information. Confirming the activation of Mind's Eye, a legendary-ranked attribute.]

'Nice.'

[Player Kasugano Yuno's attribute, Eyes That Can See the Essence, the Past and the Future, is not resisting.]

The first time I had a glimpse of the Dark World was a coincidence, the second time was because of the interference of an external force, but this time, I felt like I was able to cross over without issues. The attribute's rank was still the same, but it could be the influence of my Semi-Mythic job. I wasn't sure if this was the right expression, but I had climbed up the hierarchy of humans, so it naturally felt good.

The sign was the same as before. I felt like I was being dragged somewhere and at the same time, the scenery started to change rapidly. I felt like my soul was leaving, but that was it. Since I had experienced it a few times, I was no longer surprised. I was actually starting to feel really happy. Even though it wasn't the future that would soon unfold, the Dark World was still very important to me.

'What's this? What am I looking at?'

If possible, I wanted to get a hint of the recent incident or the continuation of the scene I had seen last time. I managed to enter the Dark World, but I was annoyed because I didn't know what I was allowed to see. Still, useless scenes were better than nothing.

Even though it would only be for a moment, to stand in the same position as our lovely regressor was an achievement I couldn't describe.

The scenery started changing, and the following scene was shown without warning.

'Huh?'

Our lovely regressor had lost his mind, and a masked man was with him. The masked man was looking down at the pitiful Kim Hyun-Sung. Actually, I wasn't sure if the masked individual was even a man because I couldn't really tell their gender. Their silhouette resembled mine, but there was something off about the air between Kim Hyun-Sung and the masked person. Based on the scene, the masked scum had to have cornered Kim Hyun-Sung, and even though this was Kim Hyun-Sung's first life, he was still skilled enough that not just about anyone could corner him, so…

'This bastard was the villain in his past life. This dirty bastard… '

The scene of complete ruin was supporting my hypotheses, and I couldn't even tell where we were because of the rubble and debris. The place was extremely devastated to the point that I wondered if everything would look like this once the world ended. There were corpses everywhere, and they were decaying in real time. Pained screams could be heard everywhere as their bodies melted, and some decided to commit suicide.

'This is hell on earth.'

It seemed like they were being influenced by something, but I had no idea what was influencing them. If I were there with them, I could have gotten a hint, but unfortunately, I was just an outsider, so all I could do was watch.

'What the hell is going on?'

It was difficult for me to figure out what was going on and when exactly this happened.

'Is our Hyun-Sung going to die?'

I couldn't help but think that way; however, this scene was definitely not the ending of the Dark World. A mysterious woman stood up while stumbling, and she stood in front of Kim Hyun-Sung. The woman was a mess as well. Considering the injuries she

had sustained, it was a miracle that she could even stand up. The woman was a member of the Blue Guild, so I could obviously recognize her.

Jo Hye-Jin—Kim Hyun-Sung's adjutant. She was knowledgeable in politics, and I couldn't say she was an extraordinary individual, but she was extremely skilled with the spear. She was a friend whom I shared drinks with from time to time, so I found it difficult to look at her in her state. The way she used her spear to support herself made it seem like she would collapse anytime soon. In addition, her clothes were torn, so I had no idea where I should look.

'It's not intentional… '

To be honest, what caught my attention wasn't her shameful get-up, so I had to be uninterested in her even in the Dark World. She actually looked more pitiful than ashamed.

Anyway, despite her pitiful appearance, the way she glared at the masked person proved that she was the Jo Hye-Jin I knew, but her glare didn't last long. Eventually, she slammed her head on the ground and spoke cautiously.

"Please help."

'…'

'…'

"What?" asked the masked person.

"Help," Jo Hye-Jin repeated.

"Pffft! The woman respected by all as the Goddess of the Spear shouldn't be saying things like that. So you actually value your life." the masked person chuckled.

It seemed like they were using a voice changer, but for some reason, the dirty villain's way of talking was similar to mine.

"Please… help. I'll gladly give you my life, but please… the guild master…" she pleaded.

'…'

"I beg you. Please spare him…" she begged.

She was groveling to the point that I had to question whether she was really the Jo Hye-Jin I knew or not. The confident look she was supposed to have was no longer there. Tears kept coming out from her remaining eye, and she pushed her forehead into the ground while she was covered in dirt. The word 'humiliation' wouldn't be enough to describe this situation. Jo Hye-Jin was an extremely proud woman whose will wouldn't bend so easily, so I knew very well what it meant when she showed that side of hers.

I couldn't help but think that the masked person was someone familiar to me. The masked person gestured exaggeratedly to show their surprise before speaking, *"Ahh, so it was you. You were the one. Kim Hyun-Sung sure is popular. So many people are willing to die for him. I envy him, but at the same time, I feel bitter about it…"*

"Please, please…" Jo Hye-Jin begged.

"What should I do? I actually came today to kill him, but whenever I see people like you, I become soft-hearted for some reason. I experienced a similar situation many times, and I know deep inside how it feels to lose someone precious to you. I like this kind of love for mankind. It's amazing, isn't it? And it's beautiful as well. It's a scene you'd often only get to see in a drama or in a movie," the masked person said.

"I beg you," Jo Hye-Jin repeated.

"Loving—no, respecting… It's none of my business how you feel about him, but throwing your life away for the person you cherish is a noble thing to do. Yes, a noble thing to do," the masked person continued.

"I beg you. Please…" she pleaded.

"But you know… Rather than being sad, a scene like this puts me in a bad mood. I feel like my head is pounding, and I feel nauseous. Basically, I'm having a hard time because I keep recalling a memory I don't want to recall. Other people's tear-jerking moments make me feel guilty about what I'm doing. Ah, you're mistaken if you think I don't have a sense of guilt, Miss Jo Hye-Jin. I'm human after all," said the masked person.

'…'

The more I watched, the more uncomfortable I felt. I was hoping this wasn't the case,

but I had a feeling that the masked villain could be me. Actually, I had been feeling that way for a while now. I was basically looking into the Dark World through Kasugano Yuno, so one of us had to appear in the scene at the very least.

I wanted to curse. The Lee Ki-Young in the Dark World was a hopeless scum. He completely lost his mind after losing his pillar of support, Park Deok-Gu, so his goal was obviously revenge. I had no idea how many years had passed since Park Deok-Gu's death, but this scene would make sense if I assumed that he had experienced many things since then. I tried to guess the number of years based on Jo Hye-Jin and Kim Hyun-Sung's appearance, but it was difficult to make a guess thanks to how mana influenced people's bodies.

Anyway, my anxiety was on the rise, but I didn't have to make a quick decision because the scene was still ongoing. During all of this, the masked scum spat some ridiculous words.

"Look, Miss Jo Hye-Jin. Isn't your head hurting as well? I want to be satisfied with just you, but because of my headache, I'm afraid that my aim might be off. I'm afraid the person behind you might get hit, and we can't let that happen. You laid down your life for the person you love, so it'll be really sad if my fingers slip and an accident happens. Haha."

"In that case…"

"Aahh, please stop, Miss Hye-Jin. That's not what I'm asking for. I'm not going to tell you to kill yourself. This is part of my revenge, so it's best if I end it with my own hands. Don't you agree? My headache just has to go away, and everything will be resolved," the masked person explained.

"What… do you want me to do?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"You don't have to do anything, and I honestly don't know what I should make you do. Even if I ask you to join me, it'll be difficult for you to accept it, and I also don't want to carry a ticking bomb with me, but it's fine. I'll take care of this headache myself. I keep my promises," the masked person replied.

All of a sudden, arrows came flying from somewhere and quickly pierced Jo Hye-Jin.

"Cough…"

Jo Hye-Jin looked more relieved than in pain, and the masked person spoke to her again.

"Miss Jo Hye-Jin. Your guild master will return alive."

"Th… ank…"

"I'll be even sadder if you thank me here. Rather than thanking me… if there's anything you want to say, say it. I don't hate people like you. I can't guarantee that I'll deliver your will, but it's better than having no one around to hear your last words," the masked person suggested.

"Pant… pant… gui… ld master," Jo Hye-Jin started.

"Go on."

"Guild Master…" she repeated.

"Yes, yes."

"I… I… liked…"

"Yes, I understand, Miss Jo Hye-Jin…" the masked person told her.

'…'

"Ah… you're dead."

'…'

"I really didn't hate you…"

'…'

"But what can you do? Our circumstances were different. It's a typical line, but if we met in a different way at a different place, then we could have become friends. I may have been your enemy, but a part of me respected you. It was the same in your final moments. I honestly didn't want to end it this way, but the death of the Goddess of the Spear was more humiliating than noble… Well, I don't need to talk more about this because you're already dead," the masked person muttered.

I had an inkling about what the scum was talking about. I didn't know the details of the Dark World, but Jo Hye-Jin was a foreigner with an extreme reputation that she was hailed as the Goddess of Spear. I was certain he wanted to give her a humiliating death rather than a noble one.

The masked person didn't just leave Jo Hye-Jin's corpse behind, so they definitely still had a conscience. I knew what they were thinking. They were definitely thinking about whether they should just leave Jo Hye-Jin's corpse just like that. The masked scum and I were surely not the same person because even my heart would break to see Jo Hye-Jin die in a similar way as Park Deok-Gu.

The masked scum had to have made a decision because they slowly extended their hand out, and a black fire started rising from her corpse in response. The masked scum had just mentioned Jo Hye-Jin's humiliating death, but he didn't say anything as he picked her spear up and placed it on her ash. Afterward, they turned around slowly and mumbled while removing their mask.

"I feel like shit…"

I had been hoping that we weren't the same person, but his face looked exactly like mine.

CHAPTER 330
US IN THE DARK WORLD (3)

Content Warning: The chapter below contains material about suicide. Please proceed mindfully.

I spaced out for a moment. Obviously, I wasn't happy with what I was seeing. Anyone could tell that the Lee Ki-Young in the past life was a scummy villain, and even I wanted to curse at him. I didn't know what he had to go through, but the air around him had drastically changed. He had dark circles and had lost a lot of weight, making him largely different from my current appearance.

My head was filled with complicated thoughts, but I couldn't organize them right now. I thought it couldn't get any worse, but I had never imagined it would be this serious. I don't know how this incident happened, but Kim Hyun-Sung had lost his mind, and Jo Hye-Jin died. The surroundings were in ruins, and there were so many dead people it would be pointless to count them. It felt as if there was a war—actually, I was sure an incident this big was caused by war.

'Is he… '

It could be possible that the man our lovely regressor had been working hard to find was me. Killing Jo Hye-Jin was a good enough reason to get revenge. Based on the reaction Kim Hyun-Sung had shown when Xiaolin called me 'the masked man,' my assumption could be correct. At the time, I thought he simply reacted that way because of Xiaolin's presence, but it was probably because of what she called me. Moreover, the awkward expression he showed afterward was bothering me a lot.

I decided to watch the situation a little longer, but I felt an unknown power trying to push me out. I couldn't really describe it, but as someone who wanted to see what happened afterward, I was shocked. It looked as if someone was rewinding a video. The scene where arrows pierced Jo Hye-Jin, the scene where I first saw Kim Hyun-Sung, as well as every scene I had seen was passing by so fast that I couldn't tell what was happening. I had an idea about what this was because time quickly passed by

like this the previous time as well. But this time, time was rewinding.

I saw interesting scenes while it was rewinding, but of course, I had no idea what was going on in those scenes. After the scene where Kasugano Yuno and the other me were together passed by, the person I saw was…

Jung Ha-Yan?

I saw her with the other me.

"Oppa, I love you. I really love you."

"I love you, too."

What was going on? I had no idea why Jung Ha-Yan and the other me were together, but they looked pretty sweet together. However, what surprised me the most was Jung Ha-Yan's eyes. Madness and obsession couldn't be seen in her eyes. To be exact, she looked like a simple girl who would easily break. She still had the same features: large eyes, hair that came down to her shoulders, and a face she always had a difficult time putting makeup on. I acknowledged that she had a cute face, and I couldn't help but question if there was something wrong with me. However, the Jung Ha-Yan I was seeing right now was *really* cute. It was also absurd how she suddenly jumped up in front of me.

In addition, I had never imagined that I would see Jung Ha-Yan and the other me making love, and the sight was so lively I started blushing. Seeing Jung Ha-Yan being attached to me even in the Dark World made me feel bad, but I was technically the one making love to her, so I didn't feel ashamed. However, I couldn't stop myself from blushing. Fortunately, I was maintaining a deep relationship with Jung Ha-Yan in the real world, so the uncomfortable feeling quickly disappeared.

During all of this, I noticed that Jung Ha-Yan was really passive, so when comparing her to the present Jung Ha-Yan who was aggressive…

'She seems like someone else… '

I couldn't help but think that she could simply be a Jung Ha-Yan lookalike, but the person I was looking at right now was definitely Jung Ha-Yan. The way she cried was the same as the present Jung Ha-Yan, and she was also trying her best to get the other me to like her.

"Yes, you're right, Oppa! I-I think it's fate that I met you, Oppa. Fate. I'm certain of it."

Or…

"I-I'm sorry. I'm really, heuk… sorry…"

I had no idea how I met Jung Ha-Yan here and seeing that Park Deok-Gu wasn't beside me, we probably met after his death. The lack of information caused me to become even more interested because I had never imagined that Jung Ha-Yan and I had actually made contact in our past lives. I had this dumb thought that the reason I was struggling so much with Jung Ha-Yan in my current life was that I was probably paying for the sins I had committed in my past life.

I started to become wary of my surroundings because I was curious about what that scum had done to Jung Ha-Yan. She and the other me always looked happy, but the strange part was that aside from the two of them, I couldn't see anyone else. I couldn't tell where they were. The place looked like a magic research lab or a large room, and no matter how hard I looked, I couldn't see other people.

I thought about the possibility of the other me being imprisoned by Jung Ha-Yan, but that wasn't the case because the Jung Ha-Yan of the Dark World didn't seem to have the mindset of the current Jung Ha-Yan.

'What's going on?'

I was curious, but that curiosity disappeared immediately because I was at a loss for words when I saw a shocking sight. The sight I saw after the scene passed was absurd. Jung Ha-Yan was being abused both mentally and physically, but she still stayed by the other me's side. Similar to what she was doing in our current lives, Jung Ha-Yan was obsessed with me, and she accepted all the abuse because she was worried that I would hate her.

"I love you. I love you, so please don't say that."

Despite the abuse, I couldn't understand why she was hugging the other me. Even in the Dark World, Jung Ha-Yan's affection was definitely her bane.

"Hehe, I love you."

While smiling…

"I like you a lot."

She would hug the other me like an idiot and that evil scumbag would smile in response. I was sure he was thinking that Jung Ha-Yan was now on his side.

The scenery changed again, and in the following scene, Jung Ha-Yan was alone in a quiet room. To be exact, the Lee Ki-Young of the Dark World was watching her through a strange crystal ball, but I could clearly see what was going on. I didn't know how much time had passed since the previous scene, but the way she stared at the ceiling with her messy hair showed that she was on the brink of collapse.

'What's going on?'

She was looking at the rope hanging from the ceiling, so it was obvious what she was thinking. She had definitely cried a lot because her eyes were swollen, and the items in her rooms were strewn about it was hard to describe what they were. It was ridiculous how Jung Ha-Yan kept reading a letter. I didn't know what was written in the letter, but she was reading dozens—no, hundreds of letters while crying. Happy memories had to be written in those letters because Jung Ha-Yan was smiling like an idiot while perusing them. They were probably letters she had written and exchanged with the other me while they were dating, but as time went on, she frowned and started crying again.

"I like you. I love you. Heuk… So please come back. It's my fault. Please come back…"

Of course, the other me wouldn't answer because she was talking to herself. Actually, there was a high chance she knew that the Lee Ki-Young of the Dark World was watching her, but right now, it seemed like she didn't have the luxury to worry about her surroundings.

"I'm sorry. I'll do better from now on, so please don't say that. Don't tell me that you hate me…" Jung Ha-Yan begged.

'…'

"Hiccup. Heuk. Please. I beg you. If you're watching, please say something, Oppa. Just like you always do. I don't like this. I really don't like breaking up like this," she continued.

"You remember the first time we met? I remember it all. I gained the courage to confess

to you, and I remember your surprised look that day. I also remember how we ended up together. The day we became a couple, the days we fought, the days you were angry, I remember it all. I miss you. I really miss you… I really won't… say that I don't want to do it. I'll do everything you ask me to do. I don't care what happens to other people now. No matter what happens to them, I won't be distressed. I just need you. So please come back. Don't say that you hate me. I'll do whatever you want. Heuk. Heuuk…" she pleaded.

'…'

"You said it was fate. You told me that it was fate that we met and that when we're reborn, we would meet again—that we would always be together. Hiccup… I really don't like it. Your absence is really painful. I can't do anything. Nothing. I-It's better if I die. It's better—" she paused.

'…'

Even though she had made her decision, she was still hesitating because it wasn't something that could easily be done.

"Hiccup, hiccup…"

She kept on hiccuping and groaning as she looked at the ceiling and outside. She even stepped up and down on the chair several times.

"It's really painful… I can't think of anything… I'm scared. Please help me, Oppa. Please help. Please smile like before. Hiccup. Heuuuk…" Jung Ha-Yan begged.

She would either grab her own hair and cower, or she would cover herself with a blanket. However, the choice of action didn't matter because her eyes were still focused on the rope hanging from the ceiling. At that, I started to feel bitter.

"Yes… he told me this."

'…'

"T-That we would meet in the next life. He told me that. That's right. It'll only hurt for a moment. I'll feel better after suffering for a bit. It won't be dark. He said we're going to meet in the next life, so I'm sure that will happen. Hiccup…" she mumbled.

‘…’

Jung Ha-Yan was shaking, and she seemed to be having a hard time as she slowly stepped onto the chair. I know very well how hard it was to take your own life. There were people who would say that they would commit suicide because of a *dumb* reason, but the weight of stress each and every person could handle was different from each other. It was an extreme choice a person could only make when they had more courage to take their own lives than to live. As such, it couldn’t really be said that they were dumb for doing such a thing. To be honest, it was painful to watch this.

“Whoo, whoo… Oppa will realize how much I loved him. O-Once he finds out that I’m dead, he’ll remember me forever, right? He may even r-r-regret it. He may be sad. I may disappear, but I’ll remain in his memories forever. It’s better than being forgotten. Yeah, t-that’s better because we’re going to meet in the next life. That’s what oppa told me. That’s right,” she continued.

‘…’

“No. H-He may come and save me. H-He always came whenever I was in pain. Oppa might suddenly appear. It’s possible. Hiccup… it’s possible…” she muttered.

Drip, drop.

Her tears kept on falling to the floor, and her voice started to tremble even more. Jung Ha-Yan started to breathe raggedly, and eventually, I couldn’t hear anything else anymore other than her groans.

“Heuuuuuk. Hiccup.”

‘…’

“Heuuuuk… Hiccup. Please, please…” Jung Ha-Yan begged.

She kept hesitating, but in the end, Jung Ha-Yan made a decision. She placed the rope around her neck and started hanging.

“Cough… cough…”

The sound of her groans filled the room.

I was sure she could sever that rope with magic, but when I saw that she wasn't doing anything, I became filled with even more pain. The moment I unknowingly extended my hand out toward the crystal ball the other me was looking at, my body was sucked in, and I saw Jung Ha-Yan struggling in front of me.

"He'll… come to save… cough, me. Oppa… will come…"

He obviously wasn't coming, but Jung Ha-Yan continued to mumble the same words while staring into space. The strange part was that she seemed to be staring at one particular side and it was probably a misunderstanding, but she was staring at where I was standing. I was surprised, so I looked behind me, but no one was there. I saw myself being reflected in her eyes that were losing their light. I didn't think that others could see me in my current form, but Jung Ha-Yan, who was about to die, might be able to see me. Of course, I could just be imagining things, and Jung Ha-Yan could simply be seeing things as well, but for some reason, I was sure that she was looking at me right now. I was touched by the way she was mumbling.

"You came. You came… to save me."

Her body was slowly becoming limp, and although I wanted to rush over and cut off the rope, I couldn't interfere with the Dark World. I tried talking, but my voice wouldn't come out.

"I'm glad. I'm glad… we can really be together…" she muttered.

Oddly enough, I felt tears rolling down my cheeks, and Jung Ha-Yan was crying as well as she reached out with her hand while seizing.

"Love…"

And that was it…

Jung Ha-Yan stopped moving, and my lips shut tight.

CHAPTER 331
US IN THE DARK WORLD (4)

It was similar to when Park Deok-Gu died. I thought I wouldn't be disturbed, but I was wrong. Of course, I would feel tormented to see the person I had grown so fond of die in front of me. To be honest, I didn't think I would be this agitated. It was true that I had grown fond of Jung Ha-Yan, even though there were times when she was frustrating to deal with, but I felt as if there was something wrong.

Anyway, my head started to hurt even though this happened in the Dark World. I knew it wasn't good to be immersed in the scenes, but I couldn't help it, which frustrated me. The current Jung Ha-Yan was spending her days happily, and she was living a different life compared to her past life.

When I breathed in, I felt like my body and soul were calming down, but the most shocking part during all of this was the fact that I was truly paying for the sins I had committed. Shit. The joke I had made earlier became a reality. Apologizing wasn't enough to cover the sin I had committed, so it was right to think that the sin I had committed was so great it was indescribable. From what I had seen, I had basically driven Jung Ha-Yan to the edge of the cliff and pressured her to jump off. However, I was even more astonished when I thought about how I was being punished right now by having to deal with Jung Ha-Yan's obsession with me in the current timeline.

If Jung Ha-Yan ended up being the same as the Dark World Jung Ha-Yan, eighty percent of it would be my fault. However, if I could blame others, I would do it in a heartbeat since that was the petite bourgeoisie's way of thinking.

When I smacked my lips due to the bitterness, the scenery changed once again. Whenever I established a connection with Kasugano Yuno, I would always see a lot of scenes, and this time was no exception. I wasn't sure if my assistance had influenced her, but I was lucky to be able to see so many episodes. The scene I was about to witness right now was probably a scene that would happen the soonest.

It happened shortly after Park Deok-Gu's death. When I saw the spiteful and extremely thin other me in the Dark World, questions popped into my head. Where was the other me headed and where was the other me currently located? The place

looked like an underground water tunnel, and in some ways, it looked like an abandoned dungeon.

I couldn't help but think of how hostile the Dark World was whenever I was looking at it. One thing I was sure of was that the place the other me was currently headed wasn't a nice place because I couldn't imagine a location overflowing with honey and water after passing through this place. As expected, I heard a woman's voice from a dark corner.

"It has been a while. So… you're Lee Ki-Young, right? I'm sorry for getting your name mixed up. I'm bad at remembering names…" she said.

"No, it's fine," said the other me.

"I didn't think that you'd still visit this place… Actually, I didn't think that you'd still be alive, but I'm glad to see you alive and well," she confessed.

"I had some issues, but I don't think you're all that interested." The other me pointed out.

"You're right. How you survived isn't what's important. It's about why you're here. You rejected my offer a few years ago—ah, did that big man die?" she asked.

'…'

"I didn't think he'd survive long, so my assumption…" she trailed off.

'…'

"To be honest, the fact that he survived that long is a—"

"Shut up," the other me interrupted.

"What?"

"I told you to shut up. If you keep blabbing one more time, I'll rip that mouth of yours," the other me threatened.

"I must have misheard. Are you sure you were saying that to me?" she asked.

"Of course, I was saying it to you, you dirty bitch! Do you really think you have the right to say something like that? You went around telling people that you were the Saint of the Forsaken, but you got backstabbed and ended up in a cheap whorehouse." The other me pointed out.

"What?"

"Am I wrong? Sun Hee-Young?" the other me asked.

"You crazy bastard…" she muttered.

Why was she here? The person from the dark was Sun Hee-Young, a member of the Blue Guild. I knew the ending to that incident wouldn't be a good one, but I had never imagined that the Lee Ki-Young of the Dark World would meet her in a place like this. In addition, it seemed like this wasn't their first meeting. Unfortunately, it seemed like the other me and the Sun Hee-Young of the Dark World didn't have a good relationship, and Sun Hee-Young's appearance was completely different from what she looked like in the present. It could be seen from her face alone that she had experienced a lot of hardships. The present Sun Hee-Young was maintaining a saintly image, but I could sense a bit of madness within the Dark World version of Sun Hee-Young. I heard from the other me that the people in the slums had backstabbed her, causing her to end up in a cheap whorehouse. I knew that was going to happen, but she just looked so different compared to the present her that my jaw went agape.

I had been suspicious about how Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't familiar with her, but it was probably because Kim Hyun-Sung was only working in the dark, without even dealing with foreign affairs with his own hands. As for Sun Hee-Young, she could have died earlier than I had expected, but that wasn't important in this scene.

"I'm not wrong," said the other me.

"Do you want to die?" Sun Hee-Young threatened.

"I could ask you the same thing, you crazy bitch!" the other me insulted.

"You!"

I was more bothered about what kind of place they were in rather than how Sun Hee-Young ended up here. I had no idea what she meant by what she said about the other me visiting her before and the latter rejecting her offer, but it didn't mean that

I couldn't make any assumptions. If possible, I wanted my assumptions to be wrong, but the voice that suddenly echoed from the depths of this place confirmed that I was right.

"Stop. I think that's enough, Miss Hee-Young. And… it has been a while… Mr. Ki-Young."

It was the psychopathic murderer, Jung Jin-Ho. He was another villain and was Kim Hyun-Sung's enemy in his past life. He was the founder of the Murder Brigade. I wanted to use Mind's Eye to see his stats, but it wouldn't activate, and honestly, I didn't need to see it. I didn't need to see his stats to confirm that he was strong. The Dark World version of Jung Jin-Ho looked the same as the Jung Jin-Ho I had met. He had a lot of swords on his waist, and he was wearing light armor. It seemed that he preferred light armor for ease of movement.

No matter how hard I thought about it, he looked like he was going to become the scummiest of all scum, so I felt proud of getting rid of him in the present life.

Lee Ki-Chul was next to him, and he was the one who became the burning zombie's food. I saw a criminal with a familiar face and saw many other bastards next to them. Of course, they had no idea about the present me. There were over ten members, and they all had to be strong because they had done so many evil things that even our lovely regressor was shocked upon hearing them.

Obviously, they couldn't be compared to Cha Hee-Ra or Park Yeon-Joo of the Eight Seats, but the group had made a name for themselves as the underdogs. The group was stronger than I imagined.

Anyway, when Jung Jin-Ho greeted Lee Ki-Young of the Dark World, the other me nodded and greeted him back. The atmosphere was pretty intimidating, but Lee Ki-Young didn't seem scared.

"Yes, it's been a while," said the other me.

"Ugh, this is troublesome," Jung Jin-Ho muttered.

'…'

"I recall sending you back under the condition that you don't come looking for us again. You should have died the moment you rejected our offer. I was fickle and considerate when I let you live, but I didn't think you'd visit us again. Ah, if you have good news for

me, then I won't do anything dangerous; however, depending on the situation, you may have to die here," he warned.

'…'

"Can I hear the reason for your visit?" he asked.

"I'm sure it's not bad news…" the other me answered.

"Go on…"

"It's a bit embarrassing, but I'd like to change the answer I gave you regarding your offer last time," the other me continued.

I knew it.

"I see. It is good news, but our position has changed compared to when we tried to recruit you. We did need you at the time, but I don't think we need you right now," answered Jung Jin-Ho.

"I'm sure I'll be helpful," said the other me.

"I know you'll be helpful and I already know how talented you are, Mr. Ki-Young. However, if there are two leaders within a group, it'll create confusion. I'm sure you understand what I'm saying, but basically, the brigade already has a leader. In some ways, the leader is more talented than you. Personally, I'd like to recruit you, but the opinions of the other members are important as well. Of course, the leader's thoughts are the most important, don't you agree? The opinions of the brigade members are the top priority. I like you, but my family is the most important," Jung Jin-Ho explained.

It was a ridiculous sight to see Jung Jin-Ho gesticulating as he looked around. In response to his words, some members spoke…

"Kill him."

"Let's kill him."

"I agree with killing him."

"I'm in."

The ones who had spoken were fraternal twins—female and male. A tall, thin man nodded in response as well, and a man with one leg also spoke cautiously. I had no idea who they were, but I decided to remember their faces because I had to kill them as soon as I saw them. I memorized the faces of those who vetoed my application to join the group. I was a bit surprised to see that Sun Hee-Young didn't agree to kill me. My unique habit could have influenced her, but she had always been a cautious person.

They argued a bit, but there were people who voted to observe the other me in the meantime.

"It seems like the opinions are divided in half, but before that, we should hear his intention: why do you want to join the brigade? I have a hunch, but I'd like to hear it from you," Jung Jin-Ho asked.

"Revenge," the other me answered.

"And the target is?" Jung Jin-Ho questioned.

"All the rotten humans on this continent," replied the other me.

"Ha… haha. Hahahaha!"

"It's not funny…" the other me interrupted.

"I'm not laughing because it's funny. Hahaha. Amazing. Amazing indeed. Haha. That kind of passion is important. What do you think, everyone? He says he wants to take revenge. Mr. Ki-Young, did you know? Everyone here didn't join because of the same reason. For some, it was an impulse, and for others, it was for pleasure. There are some who joined simply for money or because they enjoy killing, and there are others who joined because they're disappointed in mankind. Although everyone joined for their own reasons, no one here will think badly of your reasons. I'm sure the majority of the members of the brigade will agree with your reason as well. We grow by feeding on those negative energies, and I especially like that you have a clear goal," Jung Jin-Ho explained.

"So…"

"It's still impossible. But if our original leader agrees, then I'll agree as well. Hm… I think that's why the situation turned out this way. What do you think?" Jung Jin-Ho

asked.

When the psychopathic murderer Jung Jin-Ho turned around, I saw a woman on a seat. She was probably the so-called ‘original leader’ he had mentioned. She was wearing a mask, and funnily enough, the mask she was wearing was the same design as the mask I would wear later on.

The woman slowly took her mask off and spoke, *“Welcome to the brigade.”*

This scene couldn’t be more ridiculous, but I recognized her.

Lee Ji-Hye…

The system had acknowledged her as my soulmate.

CHAPTER 332
US IN THE DARK WORLD (5)

The surprise only lasted for a moment. I could feel myself getting sucked away somewhere, so I had no choice but to anxiously memorize the scene. All I could think of was, 'this can't be happening,' because I honestly wanted to know what happened afterward. I still hadn't seen all the brigade members just yet, and I also hadn't seen what they would do.

I was most curious about why Lee Ji-Hye ended up at a place like that. I didn't think she simply died in her past life, but I had never imagined that she had been a part of the Murder Brigade. Of course, she didn't apply to the brigade in her current life because it was never created. It wasn't something I had to know, but I couldn't help but be curious about it. It felt like I got interrupted while watching a drama and I felt even more uncomfortable thinking that the members of the brigade could still be working discreetly.

It wasn't just a groundless assumption. Since Jung Jin-Ho wasn't around, their group had to be weaker than it was in the Dark World. However, the members of the brigade had outstanding stats and personalities for them to be considered incompetent, and it wasn't like they needed a leader to be able to do something. Similar to my original assumption, even if the brigade was never formed, I was certain that each and every one of them was actively working incognito.

I didn't want to come back to my senses, but my eyes slowly started to open against my will. I thought I would see something different, but I guess that was it for this round. I saw a familiar scenery different from the Dark World.

'Shit… '

I was lying on a bed, so I thought I had a good time with Kasugano this time as well, but that didn't seem to be the case. Kasugano Yuno was sitting on a chair and was protecting me.

"Did you obtain what you wanted?" Kasugano Yuno asked.

“Half of it… Thanks. I think I finally understand why you told me that, and I now have an idea about the future you had seen…” I replied.

“I’m very glad to hear that it was helpful,” she commented.

“How long has it been?” I asked.

“It hasn’t been that long. Do you… need time to organize your thoughts?” she asked.

Kasugano Yuno knew I was having complicated thoughts.

“I’ll just—”

“No, there’s no need for you to leave. Is it possible for me to see it again…” I requested.

“I’m sorry, but that’s impossible, Master. P-Please kill me. I’ll take any punishment—”

“No, it’s fine. I didn’t think it would be possible,” I interrupted.

Regardless of whether she was feeling fine or not, it was probably impossible to continuously watch the future or the Dark World. Kasugano Yuno’s power was beyond logic, and it was just natural that it couldn’t be seen continuously. It was unfortunate, but I couldn’t keep clinging onto her, so for now…

‘I should arrange the events in chronological order.’

It seemed like a good way to keep track of the disorganized events. Organizing the things the Lee Ki-Young of the Dark World had done after Park Deok-Gu’s death was the priority.

Chronologically, these were what happened:

1. The Lee Ki-Young of the Dark World joined the Murder Brigade after Park Deok-Gu’s death. Since he didn’t join the brigade with Kasugano Yuno, it’s safe to assume that he joined the first group. With a goal in mind, he naturally thought that he needed a force to achieve it. Since the brigade fit perfectly with what Lee Ki-Young was trying to achieve, it was understandable for him to take the risk of joining them.

I didn’t know why Lee Ji-Hye was there, and I didn’t have to see it to know that they

had done extremely evil deeds and kept on recruiting people into the brigade. I had to wonder if the other me stayed with the brigade for a long time, but it was likely that the other me worked with them until he gained enough power.

2. Jung Ha-Yan's death happened after that.

A lot of time passed after the first event. I didn't know whether he kept on working with the brigade or with Lee Ji-Hye. It also wasn't clear whether he was with Kasugano Yuno or not. One thing I was sure of was that he had driven Jung Ha-Yan off a cliff. Guessing the reason was easy. I was sure Jung Ha-Yan was affiliated with Lindel at the time, and although she wasn't working with the Blue Guild, the scum of the Dark World had to have recognized her as an enemy. I had to think about why he didn't drag Jung Ha-Yan with him, but in the end, the scum abandoned Jung Ha-Yan, and she committed suicide as a result.

— Really… I won't ever say that I don't want to do it. I'll do whatever you ask me to do, Oppa. I don't care what happens to other people.

Those were Jung Ha-Yan's words. I couldn't remember it word for word, but I was certain she mumbled similar words before taking her own life. At some point, I was sure that the other me had pressured her to do scummy things with him and unlike the current Jung Ha-Yan, the weak-hearted Jung Ha-Yan of the Dark World had to have rejected his offer. It was possible that he asked her to sell information to his allies or made her do simple chores, but she couldn't turn her back to her allies at the most crucial time. In the end, he drove her off a cliff. However, if she were the present Jung Ha-Yan, she would have taken the initiative to do such things.

'The environment is really important… '

If we assumed that the only difference between the two Jung Ha-Yan was that they met me at different times, it could be deduced that the reason they were so different from each other was because of me. There wasn't a reason for me to deny it, but…

'I do feel bitter about it… '

It was difficult to determine if the synergy between Jung Ha-Yan and me was considered good. Anyway, I was finally starting to understand why our lovely regressor would always clap in joy whenever he saw us together.

I was sure the people in Kim Hyun-Sung's party in his past life viewed Jung Ha-Yan's

death in this manner—the archmage no one dared to approach had gone completely crazy after being manipulated and used by a scum. Kim Hyun-Sung didn't think that the scum and I were the same person, so he might have thought that I was like a great shield for Jung Ha-Yan upon seeing our affection for each other. No, I was sure that was what he thought. Even in situations where Jung Ha-Yan's participation shouldn't be allowed, Kim Hyun-Sung would still send us on expeditions along with her. Moreover, I could remember that when we were on our way to the training ground and to the imperial castle, he sent Jung Ha-Yan and me together. I knew he had done that to prevent Jung Ha-Yan's death.

At the time, I thought he was just executing his strategies to make us even closer to each other, similar to what Park Deok-Gu had been doing, but after figuring out the truth, I nodded. Anyway, what happened next was…

3. A large-scale war or terrorism.

As a result, many people died including Jo Hye-Jin. There were many things I was unsure about. The problem was that I hadn't seen the group that attacked Kim Hyun-Sung's party. Obviously, I had seen myself, but the scene of complete ruins wasn't something that I or the brigade could have done. An entire city was completely devastated, and Kim Hyun-Sung's condition was so poor he couldn't get up.

Jo Hye-Jin looked like she knew me, and I also didn't see the people who shot arrows at her. The only thing I could think of was that the Lee Ki-Young of the Dark World had instigated a large-scale war that started from internal strife or war with another country, but I couldn't say for sure that either of the two was the answer.

Kim Hyun-Sung had never been angry at a specific country. Actually, he seemed like he wanted to minimize conflict while conserving as much power as possible.

'I'm sure there's a reason for Kim Hyun-Sung's regression.'

I was certain I was part of the reason, but an enemy of mankind could have appeared.

'It makes even more sense if we consider the system.'

I recalled the behavior of the transcendent being who made Kim Hyun-Sung regress, and the answer became even more clear to me. They wanted to save Jung Ha-Yan, and they wanted me to stay by Kim Hyun-Sung's side. I was probably an éminence

grise in my past life, but even though I was sticking next to the regressor, the transcendent being still felt that the issue hadn't been completely resolved. I didn't see it with my own eyes, but…

'There's a reason for his regression. I'm sure of it.'

Kim Hyun-Sung and the system were preparing for an invisible threat. It could be a demon, an angel, or even a third party might appear out of nowhere. I wouldn't be able to find the answer even if I thought about it now, so I decided not to think about it any deeper. The more important thing was why I had seen those scenes and how I could use them. I had the feeling that I already had the answer in my grasp because in the future that Kasugano Yuno had seen…

'Kim Hyun-Sung may have threatened me.'

It was a scene the transcendent being didn't want me to see, and if only I could hear from Kasugano Yuno exactly what she had seen, then I could do something about it. Of course, I probably wouldn't do anything rash like turning my back on him…

'But who knows?'

Anyway, it was undeniable that I was a villain in my past life, and discovering that truth was the biggest achievement I had obtained while looking into the Dark World this time.

I finally understood why Kasugano Yuno let Jin Cheong go. The answer was simple if you thought about it. Kasugano Yuno couldn't understand why she had that feeling, but I couldn't help but nod in agreement at her decision. Kasugano Yuno had made the best decision possible, and she had become lovely in my eyes when I turned to look at her.

'Wow… thanks.'

The doubt in my heart immediately melted away. I grabbed her face with my hands, and she flinched in surprise. I started kissing her forehead, and she started blushing right away.

"T-Thank you…" Kasugano Yuno stuttered.

"No… It should be me who should say that. You made the right choice," I told her.

“I’m sorry. How could I possibly—”

“No, you made the right choice. If Jin Cheong were in our hands or if he died, it would have made the situation even more difficult…” I interrupted.

“What do you mean…” she asked.

Kasugano Yuno had no idea that Kim Hyun-Sung was a regressor. I was sure she didn’t know that Kim Hyun-Sung was looking for the masked man and since she had forgotten the future she had seen due to outside interference, she had no idea that what I had seen today and Jin Cheong’s escape were related.

I started talking, and after hearing what I said, Kasugano Yuno started nodding away.

“Well, it’s kind of unfortunate that the demon summoner got away, but…” I trailed off.

It was better to capture him after gathering more convincing evidence.

‘That bastard is the culprit. Yup. He’s definitely the culprit no matter what.’

Demon Summoner wasn’t his only title.

‘He was the trashy and scum Jin Cheong in his past life as well… ’

After joining the Murder Brigade in his past life, in addition to cornering Jung Ha-Yan until she committed suicide, he also killed Jo Hye-Jin and backstabbed our lovely regressor. He was the éminence grise Kim Hyun-Sung had been searching for and the masked scum who had turned an entire city into ruins—he was the true identity of the bastard whom I thought was just a demon summoner.

‘The masked trash who can’t even be recycled!’

The light within me started to surge.

CHAPTER 333
HAVE NO SHAME IN LIFE (1)

Naturally, I decided to completely forget the things I had seen because I had to trick myself to trick others. I was furious at the masked trash, Jin Cheong, so even if there were a lie detector, I could pass without any issues.

'Dirty demon summoner. Piece of shit. The trash who can't even be recycled is here.'

The Dark World was a heartbreaking and sad world. I couldn't help but tighten my fists when I recalled how that scum Jin Cheong humiliated Jung Ha-Yan in his past life. My beloved fiancee suffered because of that dirty bastard, and in addition to killing Jo Hye-Jin, he backstabbed our lovely regressor as well. Even though it didn't happen in this lifetime, it still made me angry. Kasugano Yuno definitely felt my anger because she watched me quietly from a few steps away. However, I didn't think that she had any idea of what I was thinking right now

."Thanks for showing me something important, Kasugano," I said.

"I was just doing my job, Master," Kasugano Yuno replied.

"I'm glad that I got to see the masked scum of the Dark World with my own eyes. I had basically discovered the identity of the dirty scum who cornered the party of light. If I hadn't seen this today, do you have any idea what would have happened? I knew he was a bigger threat," I explained.

"What?" she asked, confused.

"Who could have known that the demon summoner Jin Cheong was a huge villain who threatened even the Dark World? Wow, I really didn't expect to see him. You really live and learn, don't you agree?" I asked.

"*Huh? A-Ah*, yes, you're right. I agree, Master," she answered.

"You understand what I'm saying, right?" I questioned.

“Yes, I completely understand,” she answered.

Kasugano Yuno desperately nodded at my question, and since she was smart, she probably knew what I meant. Kasugano Yuno had no idea that Kim Hyun-Sung was a regressor, so she seemed confused about my words, but that wasn’t important. What was more important was the masked scum’s identity. I was certain about it, and Kasugano Yuno nodded with me as well.

“You spent a happy life with me in the Dark World. After rescuing you from that isolated dungeon, I remember that we lived together. It happened when the masked Jin Cheong joined the brigade,” she explained.

“*Ah*, yeah, you’re right,” I agreed.

Kasugano Yuno participated in the useless set-up. She seemed kind of biased, but it didn’t really matter. I actually wanted to applaud her for providing details like this. Seeing her smile, she had to be writing a poetry or a fanfic in her head right now. I was basically fulfilling the wish of the Dark World’s Kasugano Yuno, so I was happy.

The heavy burden in my heart was lifted, and even though I still hadn’t made a decision on what to do next, there was still one thing I had to do. I had to prove my innocence to our lovely regressor. The goal of this mission was to indirectly convey to him that the dirty demon summoner Jin Cheong was the masked scum of the Dark World.

I could understand the reason for Kasugano Yuno’s doubts, and she spoke cautiously to ask, “If you don’t mind, can I be straightforward with my question, Master?”

“Of course. But I think I already know what you want to know… You’re wondering why I’m so focused on the Dark World, right?” I asked.

“Yes, but if you don’t want to answer, you don’t have to. I just wanted to see if I could help somehow…” Kasugano replied.

“*Hm*…”

‘It’s true that she’s helpful… ’

This mission would proceed even more smoothly if I told her that Kim Hyun-Sung was a regressor, but that was something I had to contemplate carefully.

'What should I do?'

It wasn't that I couldn't trust her, but there was a possibility that she might tell someone else. However, I started leaning toward telling her the truth because doing that would make her effectiveness soar to the roof when it was time to use her for my mission. In addition, she could be considered a part regressor. If I were to reveal to Kim Hyun-Sung that Kasugano Yuno could see her past life, this mission could become a whole new situation.

'That's it! Shit! I should've done that from the start!'

I couldn't help but feel dumb for not thinking about using her from the start. No matter what, I would greatly profit from using Kasugano Yuno.

After I made up my mind, I spoke cautiously, "Have you ever heard of a regressor?"

I saw Kasugano looking at me with her mouth agape, but unsurprisingly, she nodded in response. Kasugano Yuno had no idea that the Dark World only existed in the past life. I was sure she had a feeling after hearing what I said, but to have someone else confirm it was a totally different experience.

I slowly explained everything, and Kasugano Yuno nodded as I explained. Contrary to the importance of the content, I didn't feel like I was talking about something important. I just told her calmly that Kim Hyun-Sung was a regressor, the Dark World she had seen was the past life Kim Hyun-Sung had experienced, and that Kim Hyun-Sung was likely looking for that masked scum, Jin Cheong. Kasugano Yuno continued to nod, and even though what I was saying basically had no basis, it seemed like she didn't want to doubt me.

The moment I told her the identity of the Dark World, which seemed unclear to her up until now, Kasugano Yuno started crying.

'What's wrong with her? There's no need to cry. Wasn't she expecting this?'

She looked at me and said, "I see. *Heuk…* So that's what happened."

"That's right."

"You knew that the Blue Guild's Guild Master is a regressor…"

“I did, but that’s not the only reason I’m staying beside him… Anyway, what I told you just now is just between us. I believe you understand what I’m saying,” I said.

“*Ah*, so do the others…”

“Others?” I asked.

“The mage or the Mercenary Queen,” she replied.

“They have no idea. No one knows about this, including Jung Ha-Yan and Cha Hee-Ra. Only you and I know are privy to this,” I answered.

“*Ah!* I-I’m honored. A secret between us… It’s a secret between us,” she repeated.

“It’s nothing to feel honored about. Well, I guess you would feel that way. I’m sure you already know what you have to do from now on, but I’ll still explain the details later—is something wrong?” I asked.

“This… No, it’s nothing. Master, do you…” Kasugano trailed off.

“What?” I asked.

“Do you remember what I told you in the Dark World?” she asked.

“I don’t really know what you mean… You told me many things…” I pointed out.

“It’s the lie I told you to make sure that you’ll stay with me,” she said.

“*Ah*…”

“I told you that I saw a future where you and I lived happily ever after. I said that you simply forgot everything that happened and lived a very happy life with me. The future I had seen was bothering me, so I looked for you. I’m sure that’s the reason,” she continued.

“You did tell me that,” I commented.

“At the time, I thought I lied so that you wouldn’t leave me, Master. As a result, my foolish comment angered you, especially since you’ve just lost Mr. Park Deok-Gu. But there’s a possibility that the statement I made back then wasn’t a lie…” she added.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I’m telling you that perhaps the Kasugano Yuno of the Dark World could see the future of the second life, Master,” she answered.

“*Ah*…”

I felt like I had just received hit in the head. I didn’t think about that possibility at all. When she saw the future at that time, I thought she simply lied to stop me from leaving, but the assumption Kasugano Yuno was making right now sounded convincing. The abilities of the current Kasugano Yuno were limited, but she could see her past life. As such, it was possible that the Kasugano of the Dark World could see the future as well, which was our second life. And if that were the case…

‘That’s amazing.’

I smiled.

“I think the version of me in the Dark World was thinking about this life while she was dying. She must have been very sad and overwhelmed… *heuk*,” Kasugano Yuno cried.

“I see. Did you—”

“I died for you, Master. It was a worthy death for the Dark World version of me, and she—”

“Could you tell me exactly how you died? You told me before that you didn’t know the details, but have you recently seen anything about how you died?” I requested after cutting her off.

“That’s…” she trailed off.

It was a trivial question, but she seemed troubled about it. Back then, she had no idea of the exact cause of her death, but now, Kasugano Yuno seemed like she knew just how she died. I kept quiet because she seemed like she didn’t want me to know how she died.

When she was about to talk after seeing my expression, I raised my hand and stopped her from talking. After all, her cause of death wasn’t that important.

“It’s fine. That’s not important right now. Anyway, thanks again,” I told her.

“It’s nothing. I was just doing my job. D-Do you believe me now?” she asked.

“*Hm…*”

“*Oh…*”

I was just teasing her when I didn’t answer right away, but she seemed like her world was falling apart, so I couldn’t help but pat her head. Kasugano Yuno smiled brightly at my answer, and I started to feel better as well.

If the scenes the Kasugano Yuno of the Dark World had seen were truly her second life, then it basically meant that everything would turn out well.

‘The future can change, though… ’

Still, I felt like I was on top of the world. After all, I had just received news that my future ending would be a happy one, so I spoke while looking at Kasugano Yuno, “I hope the future you had seen is the future of this timeline. No, I’m sure those events will happen. Even if the future can change, I’m going to do my best to make sure that it will come true.”

“*Ah…* M-Master, you’ll really do that?”

Kasugano looked extremely touched. I smiled at her and immediately got the feeling that I had made a huge mistake. I slowly recalled what Kasugano Yuno had told me back then.

“I saw us together in this house. We looked h-happy. We had two children, and although I didn’t hear their names, I’m sure they were nice children.”

“*Huh?*”

When I slightly turned my head, I saw Kasugno Yuno crying while blushing.

“What?”

“I know I’m lacking, but I’ll do my best to serve you, Master,” she said.

“*Ah*, that’s not what I meant…” I told her.

“Please accept my bow once again,” she requested.

“Wait, hold on…”

Kasugano Yuno seemed to have misunderstood what I meant. I gulped, and I suddenly heard someone knocking on the door. I immediately tensed up at the thought that it could be Jung Ha-Yan, but the voice that echoed afterward didn’t belong to her.

CHAPTER 334
HAVE NO SHAME IN LIFE (2)

“Can I come in?”

“Yes, of course…”

It was Lee Ji-Hye. When she heard my respectful answer, she definitely knew that someone else was in here, as she seemed tense when she entered. Since we were maintaining a business relationship in front of others, I could understand why she looked tense. Seeing her glance at Kasugano Yuno after looking at me, it felt like she was telling me to send that woman away as soon as possible.

“I have many business-related things to discuss with you, Sub Guild Master of Blue,” said Lee JI-Hye.

I nodded in response, and Kasugano Yuno had to have realized that she shouldn’t be here, so she got up without saying anything, and I liked that part of hers. If Jung Ha-Yan or Cha Hee-Ra were here instead of her, they would have made a fuss so that they wouldn’t have to leave. In addition, if Cha Hee-Ra were here, Lee Ji-Hye would have left without entering. Aside from her slightly odd taste, Kasugano Yuno would be considered an extremely normal person.

“I’ll head out now, Sub Guild Master of Blue,” Kasugano Yuno said.

“Okay, Miss Kasugano Yuno. Good job today,” I told her.

Kasugano Yuno seemed relieved as she bid farewell with a smile. Lee Ji-Hye definitely saw the former’s bright smile because she seemed like she was sulking.

“Looking good…” Lee Ji-Hye commented.

“What?”

“That woman… Kasugano Yuno of the Yozora Guild. She looked like she was on top of the world similar to what Jung Ha-Yan has been looking like recently… Is there some

funny story going around that I'm not aware of? Actually, do you even remember what I told you?" she asked.

"What?" I asked.

"Whether you can trust that woman or not," she replied with a scowl.

'This girl… '

I calmly looked at her, and she resembled the Lee Ji-Hye I had seen in the Dark World.

'It's really interesting.'

Considering Lee Ji-Hye's stats, it should have been nearly impossible for her to survive the tutorial dungeon. However, based on her personality, she would do whatever she could to survive, but…

'Who could have thought that she would suddenly appear in the brigade?'

I recalled each and every relevant detail—Lee Ji-Hye didn't meet Jung Jin-Ho in the tutorial dungeon because it seemed that the psychopathic murderer Jung Jin-Ho looked like he was trying to recruit me first. Lee Ji-Hye probably settled down in the brigade after experiencing many twists and turns.

'My soulmate.'

I had no idea for how long we worked together in our past lives, but our relationship probably lasted for a long time. When I recalled how I was wearing the same mask as her, I came to the conclusion that the Dark World version of myself had definitely found her useful. It was the same for Jung Ha-Yan. In addition, I also had a connection with Sun Hee-Young and Kasugano Yuno in the Dark World. The connections I had with various people were really interesting.

'Did she join the brigade for revenge as well?'

It was a possibility. The psychopathic murderer Jung Jin-Ho and his lackeys were a group of crazy people from the very beginning, but Lee Ji-Hye and I were basically gray humans.[1] Basically, she could turn her back on me as well. I had no idea why, but there was a high chance of that happening based on what I had seen in the Dark

World.

I stared at her until she revealed a slightly embarrassed look, which was unlike her.

“W-Why are you staring at me like that? You’re embarrassing me…” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“No, it’s nothing. So, what kind of business do you need to discuss with me?” I asked.

“I just said it just because… I just came here to see you. Well, now that I’m here, I was going to tell you something, but… it has been really difficult trying to meet you. Do you know how much I struggled just so I could reserve a spot to visit you while you were lying down?” she complained.

“I was going to get up soon anyway. It was an issue because the people around me kept on telling me to rest. I have no idea what’s going on outside, so it’s a good thing that you’re here. How are things going recently?” I asked.

“Not much has changed. The Republic is still quiet, and despite telling us that they’re going to investigate, they’re turning a blind eye to it. *Ah!* The Sacred Democratic Country is preparing to formally mention this to the Continental Trial. The Republic will obviously decline to comment, but they’ll probably be worried about how everyone will perceive them internationally. That woman, Oscar, is surprisingly competent. Anyway, we have been pressuring them through various methods. We have been distributing data to nearby nations saying that the Republic violated the continental law, and the reactions have been pretty good,” she explained.

‘That’s good news,” I commented.

“Some nations sensitive to black magic have already turned their backs on the Republic—*Ah!* The Kingdom of Others especially reacted well to this news,” she continued.

“The Kingdom of Others?” I asked.

“Elves hate black magic. Well, I don’t really know them that much…” she answered.

“Really?”

“Have you… heard about their delegation’s visit?” she asked.

“I don’t think I have heard of that. Are the elves going to visit Laios?” I asked.

“Yes. It will probably start as a three-way alliance. With the Sacred Democratic Country as the key nation, it’ll be the Kingdom of Elves, and Laios, which is no longer a neutral nation. Wow, you really were excluded in everything, Oppa. You’re not a kid, so I wonder why they didn’t tell you… Well, you can take this chance and rest as much as you like. *Ah*, I’m jealous,” Lee Ji-Hye answered.

“It’s not that great. I honestly feel anxious just sitting here doing nothing,” I commented.

“It’s because you’re a workaholic. Anyway, that’s basically what happened recently. I’m not sure where the Republic got the guts to protect a demon summoner, but I’m sure things are pretty complicated for them. From what I heard, Jin Cheong’s personal force is pretty sizeable. It’s like a big tumor that’s difficult to remove, and the fact that he keeps insisting that he’s innocent is playing a big part as well. The truth doesn’t really matter because he has already been labeled as a demon summoner…” she explained.

“That’s true.”

“You looked really wicked. I wonder how he got involved in all of this… had he done something bad in his past life? Anyway, that’s all you need to know. *Ah!* I told you about the elf delegations, right? I’m not sure about this, but among the group, there’s supposedly a VIP,” she added.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes, but I have no idea who they are. They’re an unsociable lot, so I can’t extract information from them even if I wanted to… When the delegates arrive, they’ll probably be looking for you before anything else. Even if you’re not involved in the ongoing negotiations, it doesn’t change the fact that everything is thanks to the heroes of light who protected Laios. So… how does it feel to be a hero?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“Do you really have to ask? Look outside, noona. There’s a statue being erected,” I answered.

“You’re not being modest at all. I like this scummy side of you,” she commented.

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” I told her.

“Of course, it’s a compliment.”

Lee Ji-Hye approached me quietly and sat down. She was smiling, and she seemed happy about the fact that I was achieving things, even though I had no idea why she was happy about the achievements that weren’t hers but mine. I suddenly remembered what she said when she first extended her hand out to me.

‘I’m the type of woman who can turn a man like you into a king.’

I could also remember how she talked about the anecdotes of a US president. To be honest, I achieved my current position mainly because of my hard work, but Lee Ji-Hye did help me get here by working hard behind the scenes. She was basically my hands and feet.

“Now that I think about it, a long time ago…”

“*Ah*, so you do remember. I feel like I’m being needy by bringing it up first, so I didn’t bother to bring it up. So, what is the percentage of my share?” she asked.

“Well…” I paused.

“Just tell me. Well, it doesn’t matter what you think because I already told you before that I don’t care about what you do with that crazy mage or the Mercenary Queen. Women like me will get all the love in the end. Do you remember that?” she questioned.

“I do…” I replied.

“Do I look charming now?” she asked.

“Of course,” I answered.

I wasn’t lying nor I said it just to stroke her ego. Lee Ji-Hye was really a charming person. I stared at her, and she definitely realized that I wasn’t lying because she smiled. Lee Ji-Hye looked satisfied. Earlier, she looked uneasy when I mentioned Kasugano Yuno and Jung Ha-Yan, but her apprehension had to have been washed away when she saw me staring at her intently.

“Anyway, what are you going to do now?” she asked.

“Is there anything we have to do? We’ll just keep going like this, and you’re doing great as well. I have to get back to work as soon as possible. You already told me the news, but it’s different from being actually there, and I also won’t be updated with the current affairs if I just keep on lying down in bed. It sounds like things are proceeding in a way that’s beneficial for me, and I can’t think of a reason why the Republic is being gutsy and holding out like this. It’s kind of like…” I trailed off.

“The atmosphere is strange. It feels like they’re preparing something, and small disputes with them have been occurring in Dawan as well. There’s a chance that they’re actively trying to find their own weaknesses instead of ours, but who knows? We won’t know until we open up the box,” she responded.

“You’re right. There’s definitely—” I stopped.

‘There are certain things that are unclear.’

My personal issues were important, but there were foreign affairs I had to handle pronto. Anyway, Kim Hyun-Sung’s case was the most urgent of all, so when I started talking, Lee Ji-Hye immediately replied.

“Do you know what Mr. Hyun-Sung is doing right now?”

“He’s probably at the scene.”

“The scene?” I asked.

“The location where the demon was summoned. He has been visiting the sight with Mr. Deok-Gu recently. I don’t know if it’s because he thinks he can find something there, but he has been looking kind of scary recently. I thought he would actually be happier… How should I put it? *Ah*—he has the same look he had when we were in the tutorial dungeon; it’s like he’s serious and grim all the time,” Lee Ji-Hye described.

“*Ah…*”

“So he’s like that these days…”

‘This is bad… ’

Honestly, I didn't want him to be in that location, and that feeling was reinforced even more after seeing more details of his past life through Kasugano Yuno. This was a bad situation. Kim Hyun-Sung seemed like he wasn't suspicious of me just yet, but I started to feel anxious because he could find clues that might hint at my involvement.

"What's wrong? Your expression…" she pointed out.

"Send someone there right now and tell him that my condition is bad, noona," I requested.

"What?" Lee Ji-Hye was astonished.

"Tell him that my condition has gotten worse," I added.

"But, why…"

"Hurry." I urged.

"Alright. I can just deliver exactly what you told me, right?" she asked.

"Yeah…"

"Okay, then I'll be back after sending a request," she told me.

'Let's go with this for now.'

I naturally thought about stopping our regressor from visiting the site as much as possible. Lee Ji-Hye had just exited the room, but I could already hear some noises outside. Of course, my condition was too good for me to exaggerate my pain, but I couldn't think of any other way. I had insufficient resources, and I wasn't prepared enough to handle this urgent matter. As such, I could only act like I were sick, so I could keep him by my side.

'The problem is that I'm not even sure if this is going to work… '

I knew Kim Hyun-Sung cherished me, but if I had to give an example, he was like a husband in the middle of a really important work. I was sure that he wouldn't completely abandon his work just because his wife was sick. And tracking the traces of the masked scum from his past life could also be even more important than my

sickness.

While I was biting my nails anxiously, it happened.

“Mr. Ki-Young!” Kim Hyun-Sung called out.

‘Huh?’

“Are you okay?” he asked.

‘How did he get here so fast?’

Kim Hyun-Sung looked and sweat covered his entire face.

‘Wow!’

There was a saying that having at least one sincere friend meant that one was living a successful life. And in the twenty-six years of my life, I had just realized that I had been living a life without shame.

‘I believed in you, Hyun-Sung!’

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1. This is based on a book called 'Gray Human' and LKY is basically saying that he and LJH weren't psychos from the start like the members of the brigade ☜

CHAPTER 335
AFTEREFFECT (1)

'It hasn't even been 10 minutes!'

The site that was now in ruins was far from here, so Kim Hyun-Sung definitely ran here as soon as Lee Ji-Hye delivered the news. His agility stats were high in the first place, so to get here this quickly, he definitely used his mana. If he hadn't run as soon as he heard the news, he wouldn't have arrived here this quickly. When I saw how he was trying to catch his breath, I confirmed that he had pushed himself to the limits.

'Is it possible for someone to be this fast?'

I knew how fast people with high agility stats could be thanks to the demon worshiper, Ito Sota, but I had never imagined that someone could be this fast.

Anyway, a part of me was happy to see him like this, and even though I knew he would show some kind of reaction, his reaction was bigger than I had expected.

'I'm so proud.'

He basically got here faster than the people within the castle.

I felt bad because of the strange scene I had seen not too long ago, but I was already hypnotizing myself that I wasn't the one who caused all those things in the previous timeline and although it was a dick move, it made me able to look straight at Kim Hyun-Sung.

"You haven't… completely recovered," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"*Cough.* It's nothing like that. *Haha*, I'm okay. I just had a brief seizure… I told them not to tell you, but it looks like I interrupted your work. I'm sorry," I apologized.

I specifically mentioned how I didn't want the others to deliver the news to him. I coughed and looked at him with teary eyes as if I were on the verge of dying. At this point, I thought about continuing our conversation.

“I’m healthy. You should finish up your work.”

“It’s fine. It’s nothing urgent,” he said.

‘I’m sure it’s urgent. There’s nothing more urgent than that.’

Actually, something else was urgent as well, and it was the fact that his best friend was lying in bed.

‘Hyun-Sung, I didn’t think you cared about me this much.’

A lot had changed compared to when we were still in the tutorial dungeon. Jung Ha-Yan and I had changed, and even Park Deok-Gu, who seemed like he didn’t change that much, actually changed a bit. However, if I were to pick the person who changed the most, I would say it was Kim Hyun-Sung. As Lee Ji-Hye had mentioned, he was becoming more expressive. He expressed desperation, like right now, and he started laughing more as well. He had basically become an affectionate person. I knew I was a member of Kim Hyun-Sung's party, but this was the first time I became extremely confident about it. Upon regressing, Kim Hyun-Sung had always been moving with a huge sense of duty, but a person’s nature wouldn’t change that easily. And this guy had always been a virtuous man.

‘I’m sure it’s connected to the incident in his first life, too.’

It was highly likely that losing his comrades in addition to Jo Hye-Jin traumatized him. I became certain of my assumption because he quickly grabbed my hand.

“Wait.”

“*Cough*. I’m really okay, Mr. Hyun-Sung. It was just a simple seizure. I know my body better than anyone. I’m really fine now,” I told him.

Lee Ji-Hye and the medical team arrived at the right time. Although they were just a group of priests, the busy hospital room created a convincing atmosphere. Kim Hyun-Sung revealed a serious look, and I could feel his mana entering my body. I was sure that he wouldn’t be able to find the reason for the seizure, and I knew that because I never had a seizure in the first place.

“Guild Master, if you don’t mind…” a priest said.

“Sure…”

“We’ll keep an eye on his condition. If you don’t mind stepping back…” they said.

“Alright,” Kim Hyun-Sung replied.

“Miss Lee Ji-Hye, please explain exactly what his condition was like,” the priest requested.

“I don’t know the details either. He suddenly grabbed his chest…” Lee Ji-Hye started.

I could see that she was trying her best to think of a way to explain this to the high priest, so I hurriedly spoke up, “A brief seizure…”

“Yes, he grabbed his chest and had a seizure. I don’t really know what caused it, but I was shocked and surprised to see him seizing… He seemed like he was in a lot of pain as well. Is there something wrong with the sub guild master’s body?” she asked.

“We’ll have to take a look as well. He looks fine on the outside, but it’s likely that he’s experiencing an aftereffect,” the high priest replied.

“An aftereffect?” she asked.

“Yes, but it’s rare,” they answered.

‘What kind of set-up is this?’

I flinched for a moment, but after seeing Kim Hyun-Sung’s worried face, I thought this aftereffect set-up wasn’t so bad. This plan was originally created to put more burden on Kim Hyun-Sung, so I should be happy rather than surprised.

‘He probably won’t be suspicious of a sick person.’

The more safety measures I had, the better it would be for me.

“I thought he would be fine since his mana circuits hadn't been destroyed, but… maybe we were wrong about that…” the high priest informed.

“What exactly happened?” Kim Hyun-Sung questioned.

Our lovely regressor hurriedly spoke up when he saw how the high priest and the medical team kept their silence. I honestly didn't know what was going on either, but I had to remain quiet since they were setting everything up.

"It's a very rare case, so I'm not sure how to explain it… I think it's best if we talk outside for now since the patient is here," the high priest suggested.

"No, you can tell me," I chimed in.

"Mr. Ki-Young."

"It's fine, Mr. Hyun-Sung. I have to know what's wrong with my body," I told him.

Kim Hyun-Sung stayed quiet with a distressed look. The priests glanced at each other for a moment, and then they spoke as if they had made a decision. As the medical team representing the Sacred Democratic Country, they made a pretty reasonable assumption. And they were pretty astute as well.

"You've heard that the honorary cardinal's mana has acquired the qualities of holy power, right?" the high priest asked.

"Yes, but I don't know exactly how that happened… You did tell me something similar back at the Vatican. Is that the problem?" he asked.

"I'm not sure either. This is the first time a person has both mana and holy power… This is such a rare case that even if you were to scour the entire continent, you won't find someone else with the same case," they replied.

"I see…" Kim Hyun-Sung nodded.

"Of course, I'm not saying that having mana with the qualities of holy power is a bad thing. I can guarantee that the reason Father Lee Ki-Young recovered rather quickly was because of his holy power's influence," they added.

"Right," Kim Hyun-Sung responded.

"But if we assumed that Father Lee Ki-Young's body and mana circuits g-got destroyed and were rebuilt…" they paused.

"Yes?"

“If his mana with the qualities of holy power was the reason why his body has recovered, then…” they trailed off.

“*Ah*…”

“There’s a high chance that it’s causing an unknown aftereffect. Like his seizure just now, it’s highly likely that using his mana or doing certain actions will trigger those aftereffects,” they continued.

Obviously, I wasn’t experiencing any sequela, and I was so healthy I could even get up and dance. However, their explanation sounded reasonable. My mana with holy power qualities was the reason my body recovered! Who came up with this dramatic setup?

Lee Ji-Hye found the situation ridiculous, but she suddenly started crying. She was even better than Ahn Ki-Mo and Kim Ye-Ri at acting.

‘She’s no joke.’

Kim Hyun-Sung looked as if the world were crashing down. I could understand him because mana was an integral part of people’s lives on this continent. People would joke around saying that they would rather lose an arm than lose their mana, so I was currently playing the role of a tragic hero.

“No way…”

“Of course, nothing is certain yet. For now, Father Lee Ki-Young looks like he doesn’t have any issues using his mana and his circuits are normal as well. If he continues using his mana, I don’t know what might happen, so if possible, he should refrain from using his mana as much as possible. He must avoid situations like the recent incident or the fierce battles he had gotten involved in before,” the high priest warned.

“*Ah*, I understand,” I said.

My disappointed expression elevated the atmosphere, and Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he was having complicated thoughts. He wasn’t crying, but his trembling arms expressed her emotions. As an adventurer, this news was no different from a death sentence, and there was a possibility that I would get abandoned on this long journey.

I looked over at Lee Ji-Hye, and she nodded upon realizing what I wanted to say. She then led the medical team outside since they were done with their job here.

I was slowly building the foundation to complete my original mission, and at this point, I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to increase my holy power to another level.

"*Ha… haha*. I'm glad to hear that there's nothing wrong with my body. So it was caused by an aftereffect, but it wasn't really that serious. My body has always been weak, and I have no talent in magic anyway. Alchemy doesn't require a lot of mana as well, so I shouldn't have any issues living my life like usual. Of course, it might affect me when using magic," I said.

"…"

"*Hahaha.* I can work like usual. I was able to avoid a critical situation thanks to you, and my body is just a bit exhausted, Mr. Hyun-Sung. I'm sure I'll be able to use alchemy magic like before. After all, it's not like I can't use my mana at all," I continued.

Even though I was smiling, I looked as if I were having this sense of loss. I felt like my acting skills had improved thanks to the hidden camera pranks.

Kim Hyun-Sung was distressed as he looked at me, and his expression could only be made by those who had experienced real heartbreak. He even looked like he was about to cry at any moment.

"I'm… sorry…" Kim Hyun-Sung apologized.

'I'm going to look like a piece of shit if you apologize like that.'

"I'm sorry. It's all my fault…" he continued.

'I'll feel really bad if you do this, Hyun-Sung.'

"I'm… sorry…" he apologized once again.

"*Hahaha*. No need to apologize. The high priest said it was just an assumption, and I'm sure my body will recover in no time as well. Please raise your head, Mr. Hyun-Sung. It's unbefitting your role as the Guild Master of the Blue Guild. You must always display confidence in front of your guild members," I added.

"…"

"And please don't tell anyone what happened today. I don't want Deok-Gu or Ha-Yan to know. I'm sure they'll feel guilty about it. *Ah*, please don't tell Miss Sora as well," I requested.

"I'm… sorry…" he said.

"It's not your fault, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I told him again.

He seemed guilty about the fact that he couldn't join me in that fight, but it wasn't really that much of a big deal, so he was feeling guilty over something trivial.

'This is the reason why you were backstabbed in your past life.'

The way he kept his head down attacked the vestiges of my conscience, so I thought saying something would help. He was wavering because I exaggerated my pain, and I wouldn't be able to take any profit if he kept on wavering. This was actually my chance to make him even more determined. After all, protagonists like him would usually grow after a sacrifice from their comrade, and even though the situation was kind of strange now, this was the best situation for Kim Hyun-Sung's resolve.

"Lift your head, man," I said.

Kim Hyun-Sung seemed surprise when I talked casually, but he didn't nitpick.

"Things are a bit uncomfortable, but nothing really changed. I won't have any issues working like before. Of course, there will be many limitations, but it's no reason for you to lower your head. If it weren't for you, I would have died long ago in the tutorial dungeon, so I should be the one thanking you."

It was kind of cringey, but lines like this were effective.

"…"

"I know you're carrying a burden. I don't really know what it is, but I can feel that something is burdening you. Of course, I believe that the burden you're carrying is for us, and I won't really fall behind or get abandoned. I'm just going to start walking slower than the others, so…" I paused.

"…"

"Stand straight," I continued.

I completed my speech by hitting his shoulder, and I saw him slowly looking up at me.

"Guild Master, let's go get some fresh air. I have some things I need to discuss with you," I said, changing the topic.

The foundation was set. I still hadn't made a decision on what we should talk about first, but there were a lot of things we had to talk about.

'First of all… '

I should start by talking about how Jin Cheong flirted with Jung Ha-Yan.

'I have to protect my precious fiancee!'

CHAPTER 336
AFTEREFFECT (2)

It had been a while since I came outside and because I had always been in bed these days, I felt like I wasn't used to walking anymore, but I was happy. Even though we were walking on the trail within the Laios castle, it felt like we were in a foreign country. Unlike the Sacred Democratic Country's gardens decorated with colorful flowers, Laios' garden was filled with natural green colors. I liked how the light shone between the thick trees, and the overall atmosphere was nice as well.

Kim Hyun-Sung discreetly lowered himself as if he was trying to support me and no matter how many times I told him to stand straight, he wouldn't do it. He seemed like he was feeling better thanks to the first aid I had received, but a part of him still felt guilty.

'I don't know why he's feeling guilty though… '

Actually, I had an idea why he was feeling guilty. Up until now, Kim Hyun-Sung was focused on his personal tasks more than the guild tasks, and he had been spending more time outside the guild. I was sure he was trying to correct the things that went wrong in his past life, but the future had changed, so the things he was doing were useless. If I had to describe it, he was so focused on the ghosts of his past life that he was missing out on the important things. The fact that the masked scum Jin Cheong was starting a new life in the Republic was a regrettable mistake, and I was even experiencing serious aftereffects. As such, the fact that he hadn't been taking care of his guild mates could be the reason he felt guilty.

From my point of view, I was relieved that he hadn't been staying by my side all the time, but I didn't want to stop him from thinking that way. Even now, he was being extremely considerate towards me, and although I wouldn't collapse, he seemed worried that my legs would give out and cause me to collapse.

'There's no need to do this.'

For some reason, I could feel other people watching us. I also started noticing how the maids kept glancing at us. I thought it would be better to go somewhere else, but

I was sure they weren't able to hear our voices here.

"What was it you needed to talk to me about?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"It's something important," I started.

Naturally, I had to think about how to start it because if I suddenly brought Jin Cheong up, he could actually become suspicious of me. Of course, he didn't seem suspicious of me right now, but it didn't hurt to be careful about it.

Since Kim Hyun-Sung had spoken first, it seemed that he was aware. He seemed as if he knew what I wanted to talk about.

"Is it about Laios…"

"That's right. I thought it would be better if you knew the exact progress…" I replied.

"I have a general idea, and I didn't want to put the burden on you right away, Mr. Ki-Young. I'll take care of this incident—"

"No, no, it's fine. You don't need to worry about me that much. Lying in bed all day is a bit frustrating, and this incident is important to me as well. It's very important. Deok-Gu probably doesn't know though, and… I have a favor I'd like to ask you for now," I interrupted.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

'Can I do it now?'

I was frustrated because I couldn't read Kim Hyun-Sung's mind, but I was curious if he was suspecting Jin Cheong to be the masked scum. Based on the situation, it was highly likely that it was the case, but if Kim Hyun-Sung had seen Jin Cheong working with the masked scum in his past life, then things could become a bit complicated.

'What if… '

What if Jin Cheong and Kim Hyun-Sung were best friends in his past life? What if Jin Cheong and the masked scum were enemies? What if Jin Cheong was one of the people the masked scum had killed? Similar to the aforementioned examples, if Jin Cheong wasn't the masked scum in his past life, then Kim Hyun-Sung could have

excluded the demon summoner and masked scum Jin Cheong from the list of suspects. It was also possible that he had already started investigating under the assumption that all of this was planned and done by a third party and that they were trying to frame Jin Cheong. If that were the case, careless remarks could make him suspicious of me. I had to slowly and cautiously make him start thinking that Jin Cheong was the masked scum. I had to make sure that everything he had confirmed as facts in his past life would all turn out to be a lie, and the key to doing that was Jung Ha-Yan.

It seemed a bit early, but this was the right thing to do.

"It's about Ha-Yan," I said.

I wanted to tell him that…

'I want him to know that Jin Cheong kept flirting with Ha-Yan.'

I obviously couldn't say that directly, and I had to speak formally as well. If I were to exaggerate my story, then it could become a pretty decent story, but I couldn't give him the answer directly. Kim Hyun-Sung had to figure out on his own that Jin Cheong was the masked scum.

"About Miss Ha-Yan?" he asked, nodding.

He seemed kind of surprised. However, when he saw my serious expression, he revealed a serious look as well.

"It'd be fine if I were just misunderstanding it, but there are some things I'm suspicious about," I continued.

"I see…"

"When I first encountered the foreigners of the Republic—" I started.

I was about to reveal the details of the incident bit by bit, but a loud voice interrupted me.

"*Ah!* Hyung-nim! Bro! What are you doing over there?!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

'Ah, shit. Park Deok-Gu!'

I forced myself to turn his way, and I heard him shout even louder.

“Hyung-nim! I’m over here!” he yelled again.

He started running toward us. It would be nice if he could read the air, but because he had interfered when I was about to start a serious conversation, the atmosphere turned into an ambiguous one.

I waved at him to go away, but he had to have understood it as me telling him to come here because he charged in our direction like a truck with no brakes.

“Hyung-nim. Are you allowed to move around like this? Is there nothing wrong with your body? Didn’t you say you were in pain earlier? I was wondering what happened when Hyun-Sung bro suddenly started running toward the castle… I was really worried. But you must be fine seeing that you can walk around like this. Now, I feel relieved,” Park Deok-Gu said.

I couldn’t help but resent him when he took a deep breath of relief. I wasn’t sure if he was actually worried about me, but Park Deok-Gu seemed like he was looking for me. He had probably heard the news that I had a seizure since he had been with Kim Hyun-Sung. I felt bad because despite acting like he was fine, Park Deok-Gu’s eyes were already filled with tears. However, that was a different matter altogether. I had to send him away because I had something important to discuss with Kim Hyun-Sung.

“I think there has been a misunderstanding. I’m fine, Deok-Gu. I’m the same as usual. Anyway, let’s talk later. First, go to Ha-Yan—”

“*Ah!* Were you worried about noonim as well, hyung-nim? Don’t worry about her. I told Miss Jung-Yeon to take care of noonim, so you don’t have to worry. I’m sure not even an ant will be able to enter her room,” he interrupted.

‘What kind of bullshit is this pig talking about…?’

“I kept it to myself because I thought you and the bro would worry, but *geez…* you really know everything, hyung-nim. I expected nothing less of you!” he exclaimed.

“What do you mean, Mr. Deok-Gu?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

I had no idea what he was talking about as well, but it seemed Kim Hyun-Sung was

really curious because the topic seemed like it was the continuation of what we were about to talk about earlier. He had to be thinking that there was something wrong with Jung Ha-Yan because both Park Deok-Gu and I had mentioned her. I was hoping that Park Deok-Gu would notice the mistake he had made by noticing Kim Hyun-Sung's surprised expression and my long face, but he continued to talk loudly. My head briefly ached thanks to his loud voice, but I was overjoyed when I heard what he said.

"That demon summoner scum Jin Cheong! He was waiting for a chance to flirt with Ha-Yan noonim!"

'Deok-Gu! Shit. I love you!'

"Of course, I wasn't sure about it at first, but seeing that you have the same thoughts as me, I think I can reveal it with confidence!" he continued.

'You pig… '

"I'm sure of it!" he added.

'Why is he being helpful all of a sudden…?'

There was a chance that he wasn't actually dumb, and I couldn't help but feel that the chance had just gotten even higher after I heard what he said. Unlike ten seconds ago when I wanted him to go away, I felt that I could join the conversation he had started. I thought it would be more convincing if he mentioned it rather than me because he would be more direct about it compared to the cautious me.

"That dirty demon summoner scum handed noonim a note and flirted with her a lot! At the time, I thought he was just bugging her because she's charming and nice, but in retrospect, it was really suspicious! And then, I came to a conclusion today. Indeed I did!" Park Deok-Gu explained.

'That's right. Keep going.'

"I don't know much about magic, but it felt like the note was imbued with a strange magic! At the time, Ha-Yan noonim seemed kind of weird, and hyung-nim looked as if he didn't want to talk about it, so I didn't say anything. I was doing volunteer work, so I just followed hyung-nim when he told me to come with him, but who knew that demon summoner would be there, too?" he continued.

“I see,” Kim Hyun-Sung commented.

“This is just my assumption, but we need to consider the possibility that the demon summoner was trying to rope Ha-Yan noonim in, bro! It was also strange how he gave her a note even though hyung-nim was there with her! And the strangest part was that the seal wasn’t completely destroyed! I even… thought of the possibility that those bastards were trying to use noonim as an offering!” he added.

‘That’s a new way to interpret it… ’

At this point, he could become a writer with his storytelling skills. I couldn’t help but chuckle because it was so ridiculous, but if there were evidence that could support his story, then his story would basically become the truth.

“I don’t know much about magic, but even I know that noonim is blessed by mana, so I’m sure those bastards knew about it as well. They probably couldn’t summon the demon completely with their own powers, so they had no choice but to look for noonim because of her large amount of mana… Everything was a trap they had laid out,” Park Deok-Gu explained.

“It’s a possibility,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“I don’t know the details, but I’m sure they’re looking for a chance even now!” he added.

Park Deok-Gu looked at me as if he was asking what I thought about his reasoning and although it was different from the scenario I had written, his story sounded pretty convincing. Despite seriously commenting that it was a possibility, Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he didn’t believe Park Deok-Gu. As such, Park Deok-Gu’s words had to be insufficient for him to start suspecting Jin Cheong, so it was my job to support Park Deok-Gu’s groundless reasoning.

“So the thing Mr. Ki-Young wanted to talk about…”

“It’s similar to what he said. It’d be nice if I were just misunderstanding it, but it’s a possibility. It might be kind of late, but I had seen some strange signs. During the museum expedition, Max even mentioned that Ha-Yan was a human blessed by mana. Do you remember that?” I asked.

“I do,” he replied.

“Even from my point of view, Jung Ha-Yan’s body is a crystal with deep, magical powers. I don’t know much about black magic, but if they needed an offering, they wouldn’t be able to find anyone else better than Ha-Yan. There’s a chance that they have other plans as well. I noticed some strange things, but to be exact, I saw them,” I explained.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

I paused for a moment because it was time to tell him the important part of the conversation.

“Before the Republic escaped Laios, I saw a few people keeping tabs on Ha-Yan. Of course, it could just be my misunderstanding, but…” I paused once again.

“…”

This was when I had to mention the faces I had seen in my past life. The scums who didn’t want me to join the brigade. I didn’t consider this as an act of petty revenge for my past life, but anyway, I was relieved that I could put the burden on them. I had no idea who they were, but I was sure that Kim Hyun-Sung knew them.

“A male and female fraternal twins who look like they’re archers, a young man with one leg, and a tall, thin man,” I concluded.

Kim Hyun-Sung’s face turned serious, so I was sure he caught on. Kim Hyun-Sung mumbled, and Park Deok-Gu frowned when he heard it.

“Brigade…”

It was the perfect answer, and I wanted to scream when I heard it.

CHAPTER 337
AFTEREFFECT (3)

It was just the beginning, but a part of me felt relieved, like I had just taken some medicine. It had been a while since I felt this kind of comfort. I succeeded in indirectly interfering with the masked scum's threat to the party of light. A part of me was still bothered, but I just couldn't stand by and watch as the darkness ran amok. There wasn't much that I could do right now, so giving our lovely regressor important homework was the best method to make him suspect Jin Cheong, and it worked out perfectly in my favor.

After we were done talking about the brigade and the masked scum, Jin Cheong, Kim Hyun-Sung started becoming a bit more proactive, and among his many complicated thoughts, it became clear what he had chosen as his top priority.

'I think it would be best to make Miss Hye-Jin stay next to Miss Ha-Yan.'

He obviously chose to protect Jung Ha-Yan. The masked scum Jin Cheong could have had a negative effect on Jung Ha-Yan, just like Kim Hyun-Sung's past life, so it was a reasonable decision. We had no idea when the brigade would attack again, so making Jo Hye-Jin stay beside Jung Ha-Yan was the best course of action.

Kim Hyun-Sung stayed in Laios and took care of the internal issues. I thought that perhaps the reason he remained here was to take care of us since Jung Ha-Yan and I were still recovering here, but I was certain we weren't the only reason he stayed here.

'He's probably having a headache… '

His gut was definitely telling him that Jin Cheong was the masked scum, and a part of him could have already acknowledged that fact. Obviously, he wanted to do something about it, but he wasn't almighty. He couldn't do things just because he wanted to.

Currently, the masked scum Jin Cheong was being protected by the Republic, and the dirty brigade was hiding somewhere. Even if we invaded the headquarters of the

Republic, we still wouldn't be able to kill the masked scum, Jin Cheong, or capture the members of the brigade, especially since we had no idea where the brigade members were staying. Kim Hyun-Sung was strong, but there was a limit to what a person could do. Of course, his limits were very high, but going to the Republic by himself was basically committing suicide.

Because of the situation, Kim Hyun-Sung was nervous but surprisingly calm at the same time. I wasn't sure if he had matured even more or if he recalled how Jin Cheong backstabbed him in his past life, but I was satisfied by what he had done.

'It's very nice.'

It wasn't a dramatic development or a twist, but our lovely regressor chose to focus more on the situation around Laios. In addition to actively leading the formation of the Three Nation Alliance, he also poured his energy into the unity of the Sacred Democratic Country's foreigners. People managing mid-sized guilds visited Laios several times a day. He also held meetings with the Eight Seats and even worked on rallying the foreigners staying in the Union of Kingdoms. Our Hyun-Sung had changed! Instead of running around to try and achieve a bunch of results, he was trying to take care of the tasks before him one by one.

'Your growth is making me cry… '

Back then, he would suddenly leave for the Republic by himself, and he only returned once he was done with the things he had to do there. It was only by then that he would come to help. I wasn't sure if a man who wasn't really good at public speaking could rally a huge force, but he made a beautiful attempt. Of course, his goal and duty were important, but…

'It's too obvious.'

It seemed like he was doing his best to either prepare for the enemy's attack or pressure the Republic. From my point of view, it wouldn't be bad if a war broke out, but it seemed that Kim Hyun-Sung wanted to separate Jin Cheong and the Republic. Naturally, there was a huge chance that things wouldn't go the way he wanted.

If the Sacred Democratic Country's three-way alliance made a move, the Republic would probably do the same, and it would be even more likely if the Republic had no intentions of abandoning Jin Cheong. If the Republic was already completely tainted

by black magic and the brigade, Jin Cheong could backstab them.

I couldn't figure out exactly what was going on since I couldn't really go outside, but as Lee Ji-Hye had mentioned, there was a strange atmosphere. In addition, I wasn't the only one who felt it.

This was a different story altogether, but Park Deok-Gu, who had played a big part in convincing Kim Hyun-Sung, seemed anxious as well. Perhaps Kim Hyun-Sung's mention of the brigade stimulated him because his training hours had become longer. Everyone knew him as a key member of the guild, so when his training hours became longer, the guild members in Laios underwent a change of heart as well.

In the end, aside from Park Deok-Gu, the heroes of light were the only ones resting. Jung Ha-Yan was enjoying her time every day, and Han Sora cheered upon receiving a separate room for herself. I also decided to work on my tasks during this momentary peace, and the most important task was spending time with Dialugia, Smartie, and Max. The time I spent with them wasn't that long, but all three seemed pretty satisfied with it.

In addition to taking care of my family, I also took care of myself. To find out more about the Alchemist of Light, I started doing research, but it wasn't that successful because my research base was at Lindel. I didn't really rest for that long, but my body was already stiff.

After staying in bed until Kim Hyun-Sung, Oscar, the other guild members, and Pristina were satisfied, they agreed that I could return to work. I even received confirmation from the medical team. I also got the green light just in time for the alliance between the elves, Laios, and the Sacred Democratic Country.

[The Princess of Everia of the Elf Kingdom. Elena Visits Laios.]

[The news that Princess Elena of the veiled Everia of the Elf Kingdom is visiting Laios has spread like wildfire and is gaining a lot of attention. It's widely known that the delegates of Everia will visit Laios, but the fact that Princess Elena is part of that delegation has led people to assume that it was an unconventional personal arrangement.]

[It's easy for everyone to guess why Everia, the nation that refrained from interacting

with other nations due to elf slavery and discrimination of other races, showed such a radical move. According to Princess Elena's close associate, she was inspired by the heroes of light, including the Honorary Cardinal, Lee Ki-Young, who overcame the demon summoning incident in Laios. They announced that it wasn't time to reveal the other reasons and dismissed the controversies, but the Kingdom of Everia expressed great regret and anger over the recent demon summoning incident. Currently, the Kingdom of Everia is being escorted by the allied nations of Laios and the Sacred Democratic Country, and they are planning on staying in Laios from the 25th to the 31st.]

[- Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Lindel Daily.]

'Awesome… '

She had to be the important guest Lee Ji-Hye had mentioned before.

When I looked down, I saw stacks of articles, but I didn't bother reading them because I was familiar with the contents of the article. Unlike the article I read just now, the other articles were checked by Lee Ji-Hye.

[Demon Summoner Jin Cheong. Who is He? - Reporter Park Sung-Kyeong of the Lindel Daily.]

[Details of the Laios Demon Summoning Incident - Reporter Merlia of the Democratic Newspaper.]

[Why is the Republic Taking Jin Cheong's Side? About the Long History Between Black Magic and the Republic - Reporter Cheon Wi of Dawan Daily.]

[The Heroes of Light Who Became Heroes of Laios. What Kind of Person is Honorary Cardinal Lee Ki-Young? Includes a Special Interview with Pope Basel. - Vatican Magazine.]

'Wow… I actually want to read this one.'

The articles I was seeing for the first time caught my attention, and when I grabbed the article, I saw nice things written on the pages. Father Basel even said: "Father Lee Ki-Young is not only a role model for all religious people, but he's also a treasure the Goddess of Benigoa has bestowed upon the continent."

I knew Father Basel cherished me a lot, but I felt good seeing him compliment me like that.

'This is what I'm talking about. Hell yeah!'

It was a partially biased article because the title alone already indicated what the content was about. Naturally, I nodded in satisfaction. I could understand why the elf princess or whatever wanted to see me.

As I smiled, I heard a voice from outside.

"Oppa!"

"*Ah*, Ha-Yan."

Jung Ha-Yan slammed the door open and walked in. Trailing behind her was Jo Hye-Jin. I felt guilty for not being able to save them from the masked scum, Jin Cheong, in their past lives, but I forced myself to open my arms while nodding.

"*Hehehe*," Jung Ha-Yan giggled.

"How are you feeling?" I asked.

"I-I-I… feel better than before, but I'm still in pain… I still feel pain in my lower abdomen. It feels like someone is kicking me constantly, and… my heart hurts, too," she replied.

"Really? How about we spend some time together after work?" I suggested.

"R-Really?" she asked, excited.

"Yeah. My schedule isn't that tight today, anyway. Come here," I told her.

I urged her, and she ran into my arms in response. Although I thought about how it wasn't good to treat her too much like a child, I would always have this urge to hug

her tight whenever I recalled how she looked and how much she suffered in the Dark World.

'That dirty masked scum, Jin Cheong!'

I was kind of surprised because she kept burying her face into my chest, but this was fine. I looked forward while patting her back, and I saw Jo Hye-Jin standing in front of me. Before she could even speak, I already knew what she would say because I heard it hundreds of times already.

"Are you really okay, Sub Guild Master?"

"How many times have I told you? I'm totally fine, Miss Hye-Jin. And please talk to me like you usually do. Sub Guild Master makes it seem like we're kind of distant from each other…" I requested.

"I'm on a mission right now, Sub Guild Master. And… even if you have recovered, it is dangerous to overdo it. I honestly wanted to cancel today's plans…" she muttered.

"*Ah*, we can't cancel them. It's the first step in bringing another race into the alliance. Princess Elena wants to see us, so it's only right that we meet her, and it's not like I can't totally move either," I told her.

"Everia's side is okay with—"

"It's fine, Miss Hye-Jin. I'm not overdoing it. *Haha*," I interrupted.

Jo Hye-Jin was pretty easygoing whenever we were out drinking, but she was too formal when working. However, it seemed that Jung Ha-Yan disliked even this formal conversation as well because she quickly pulled on my clothes as if she was telling me to focus only on her. I had experienced this pattern many times, and whenever she did this, she would always tell me something, but they were mostly useless information.

This time, however, it was an interesting piece of news.

"Oppa, did you know?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"About what?"

“According to the rumors, that elf princess can tell the purity of souls!” she answered.

Her unexpected answer made me nervous.

CHAPTER 338
AFTEREFFECT (4)

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes,” Jung Ha-Yan answered.

‘Where did you hear that from?” I questioned.

“From the Laios denizens,” she replied.

She nodded like she was sure about it, but when I saw her confident look, her remark didn’t sound convincing anymore. Of course, it wasn’t because I didn’t trust her. I just couldn’t rule out the possibility that someone had spread that lie to gain attention. Still, I decided to find someone who could confirm the truth. I glanced at Jo Hye-Jin to confirm whether it was true or not, but she unexpectedly nodded in response.

“Yes, it’s true. I don’t know the details either, but… I’ve heard of it as well.”

“Really?” I asked.

“There’s no way to tell whether it’s true or not, but there are stories that among the elves, special beings are sometimes born with those kinds of abilities. However, little is known about whether they’re able to tell the purity of a soul or if they’re simply differentiating between good and evil. There isn’t much information about elves, so nothing is certain. Especially about the high elves,” she explained.

“High elves?” I asked.

“Yes. It’s said to be a story passed down among the people on the continent. Considering that Princess Elena is the first High Elf in thousands of years, it’s more than enough—*Ah!* Stories about high elves being able to perceive the purity of souls are mentioned pretty often in the Sacred Democratic Country’s fairy tales and literature,” she added.

"*Ah*…"

'This makes it even more convincing… '

In this continent, things in fairy tales, dances, and literature weren't considered ridiculous because this wasn't Earth. The majority of the fairy tales and literature were created based on real-life stories, and many dungeons and monsters were discovered thanks to those stories. Since even dragons existed here, the existence of an elf who could perceive the purity of souls wouldn't be strange at all.

'I'm getting worried… '

I honestly had nothing to hide because I was the hero who saved Laios—no, the continent. Even if the purity of souls determined good and evil, it would be difficult to condemn me, so I didn't really have to worry. Light[1] Ki-Young's mana was imbued with holy power, and I had the Continental Guardian title with me as well.

The situation was a bit messy, but it was undeniable that I saved Laios, so perhaps…

'My soul had become a bit cleaner.'

I had done a lot of nice things recently, and even though things didn't go as planned in my past life, I was doing my best for the party of light while under Kim Hyun-Sung in my second life.

Despite having these thoughts, I started to get worried because I was about to face the unknown. Actually, I didn't care about what would happen, but it was the wish of a petite bourgeoisie to make a good impression on the powerful person of a kingdom.

In the end, I spoke to Jo Hye-Jin. I wanted to stop pretending to be sick, but I felt that this level of exaggeration should be okay.

"Miss Hye-Jin, is there a wheelchair here?" I asked.

"What?"

"I'm suddenly feeling out of breath…" I told her.

"…"

Jo Hye-Jin looked like she wanted to say something, but she fulfilled my request without any complaints. When she came back with a wheelchair, her face was filled with shame, and she released a heavy sigh, unlike when she was genuinely worried about me. She probably had an idea as to what I was up to.

'This kind of exaggeration is required.'

Even if it would taint my soul a bit, I wouldn't be too worried if I showed them an innocent and noble appearance.

"*Cough, cough*."

Perhaps it was because I had been into acting recently, but I suddenly started coughing. Jo Hye-Jin looked cold as she pushed the wheelchair, and Jung Ha-Yan obviously looked worried as usual.

Anyway, we moved quickly and arrived at the meeting room pretty fast. When I saw the boundless respect on the guards' faces as they opened the door, I started to gain confidence that I could just stand up from the wheelchair. When I entered after imitating Laios' unique greeting by placing the palm of my hand on my forehead, I saw Han Sora and Park Deok-Gu with embarrassed expressions. Of course, Kim Hyun-Sung was there as well. They probably didn't expect me to appear in a wheelchair because they moved frantically.

"What's wrong, Mr. Ki-Young? Are you—" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"*Ahh*, it's nothing, Mr. Hyun-Sung. I just felt dizzy. I have no problems walking or moving, but I didn't want to show my weak side to the Everia delegates, so I wanted to attend even if it's like this. What about the meeting with Miss Oscar and Miss Pristina?" I asked.

"It's scheduled to take place after this. The delegates from Everia asked to meet you and Miss Ha-Yan personally… Mr. Ki-Young, if you're not feeling well, you can go back to your room. The Three Nation Alliance will still be established without any issues even if you're not here," he suggested.

"*Haha*, I'm not here because of the alliance," I told him.

"Hyung-nim, are you not feeling well again?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

“It’s nothing like that, Deok-Gu. It’s exactly like I told Mr. Hyun-Sung, so don’t worry,” I replied.

“But…”

“I’m fine,” I repeated.

People were worried, and I finally understood why corporate heads often appeared in wheelchairs.

Anyway, when it was almost time for the meeting, a voice echoed.

“Princess Elena has arrived!”

The doors on the other side opened, and a few elves emerged.

‘They got here pretty fast.’

I heard the news that they wanted to meet me, but I had never imagined that they would come straight here as soon as they arrived at the Sacred Democratic Country. It seemed that I really was the hero who saved the continent.

I looked at them with a smile, and I noticed that they were giving off a different vibe from humans. Overall, they looked calm, and their footsteps felt mysterious. I had seen elves before, but they still looked foreign with interesting appearances to me, so I couldn’t help but stare at them. Among them, an elf wearing a white veil appeared. Just from the clothes she was wearing and the atmosphere she was giving off, I instantly recognized her as Elena. When I used Mind’s Eye, I immediately saw her stats.

[Checking Elf Elena Everia’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Elena Everia]

[Title - High Elf, Princess of Everia]

[Age - 231]

[Nature - A Curious Advocate]

[Job - Guardian of Elune - Legendary Rank]

[Stats]

[Strength - 19/Above rare growth limit]

[Agility - 20/Above rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 30/Below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - 92/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 35/Below rare growth limit]

[Luck - 90/Above legendary growth limit]

[Magic - 91/Above legendary growth limit]

[Attribute - A Sense of Seeing the Soul - Legendary Rank]

[She can feel the souls of other people.]

[Overall Review: Overall, her physique is weak, but her stats are incredible. She has a legendary job that can be considered a part of the Priest class, Guardian of Elune. Her legendary attribute, which allows her to perceive the purity of souls stands out as well. Of course, Player Lee Ki-Young does not have to test it out because the result is obvious.]

'Ah, it was true. Shit.'

I was astonished, and I had no idea how that attribute worked. The explanation was also very short and succinct, but I started to get worried after reading the overall review.

While I was getting anxious, Elena removed her veil, and the anxiety started to disappear little by little. With emerald eyes and hair, her appearance was ridiculously overwhelming. We belonged to different races, but using the human race's standard of beauty, she was definitely a beautiful woman.

'Wow… '

No, it was an understatement to call her beautiful. It was more like I was looking at a being that was the most suitable for the word beautiful. I was shocked awake at the thought that I had been staring at her for too long, so I looked at Jung Ha-Yan. Fortunately, she was controlling herself well while touching the ring I gave her. My unexpected proposal was the most effective in moments like these.

I nodded with satisfaction, and I heard Princess Elena's voice.

"Nice to meet you, everyone. I'm Elena of the Everia Kingdom. It's truly an honor to be able to meet the famous heroes in person."

Her voice sounded incredibly smooth, but I unknowingly started moving backward. My brain recognized her as a beauty, but I disliked her voice for some reason.

When everyone remained quiet, Kim Hyun-Sung was the first one to greet her, and when he slowly bowed, Elena did the same. I couldn't tell if they already knew each other. After all, it didn't matter how familiar I was with Kim Hyun-Sung; it was simply impossible to tell what kind of emotions he was feeling just by looking at his back.

"I'm Kim Hyun-Sung of the Blue Guild. I may be insufficient, but I'm the guild master of the guild the heroes are currently part of. It's an honor to meet you," he added.

"The Blue Guild! I have heard of your guild before. So it's the guild of Laios' heroes. I knew it," she said.

"Excuse me?" asked Kim Hyun-Sung.

"I mean… I see. Yes…" she calmly responded.

It was amusing to see how Elena started nodding. Actually, she suddenly started crying, and her tears looked like falling gems. However, I was stupefied by how she started crying after holding Kim Hyun-Sung's hand.

'Did she feel something?'

I wasn't sure, but it seemed like she had seen something in Kim Hyun-Sung's soul. I thought that perhaps she had taken a peek into Kim Hyun-Sung's past life, but that didn't seem to be the case. Looking into someone's soul and peeking into the Dark World were two different things and even the description I had seen through Mind's Eye was pretty straightforward about it. Unlike Kasugano Yuno and my eyes, Elena

could only *feel* with her attribute rather than see.

"*Oh*, I'm sorry. I suddenly… Please excuse me," Elena apologized.

"It's fine," Kim Hyun-Sung replied.

"I suddenly… without realizing it. I'm really sorry. For a moment… I apologize," she repeated.

I had no idea how to deal with this kind of situation because someone crying after greeting each other didn't happen often. If I could, I would be straightforward and ask what was going on. Unfortunately, even though this wasn't an official meeting, it was still an important one.

However, the curious Park Deok-Gu couldn't hold it in and started talking, "Did you look into his soul without his permission or something?"

"Excuse me?" Elena asked.

"I have heard rumors about that. Something about the high elf princess being able to look into souls. I honestly don't believe in things like that, but it bothers me that you suddenly started crying after seeing our bro. You don't have to tell us if you don't want to, but if possible, I'd appreciate it if you could tell us," he added.

A different kind of silence filled the room. I had never imagined that Park Deok-Gu would directly ask about something like that. I was worried that she would think of it as a diplomatic discourtesy, so I looked at her, but she didn't seem bothered by it.

Kim Hyun-Sung glanced at Park Deok-Gu, and he quickly bowed his head.

Elena shook her head and smiled before calling out, "Mr. Deok-Gu…"

"*Ah*… did I make a mistake? I-I'm sorry…" Park Deok-Gu stuttered.

"No, no, it's fine. It's okay, Mr. Hyun-Sung. I would actually like to apologize for answering late. I never thought someone would ask *that* directly, so I was thinking about how I should answer. As expected, you're very… pure and transparent," she explained.

"You know who I am?" he asked.

“Of course. I’ve only seen you through the goddess’ mirror, but you’re exactly what I had imagined. *Hehe. Oh*, you asked a question. I’m not sure if this is the proper answer, but I’ll answer it for now,” she said.

“Really?” he asked.

“Of course. At this point, it’s not really a secret anymore. *Hm*… to be exact, I can’t look into someone’s soul. It’s more like I can feel it. The reason I was discourteous earlier was that—”

“That’s how you felt about Hyun-Sung bro’s soul?” Park Deok-Gu interrupted.

“Yes, that’s an appropriate description. I should be the one who should apologize. I’m really sorry, Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung. I wasn’t trying to feel your soul… I felt it without realizing it,” she confessed.

“It’s fine, Princess Elena. I think I completely understand what you’re saying,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Thank you for your understanding. If you’re uncomfortable by it…”

“There’s nothing to be uncomfortable about. I don’t know much about souls or whatever, but it’s like smelling, tasting, and seeing for us, right?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yes, that’s a good comparison,” she replied.

“Then, it doesn’t matter. *Ahem*. It’s actually good for us. You’ll probably be really surprised once you perceive our hyung-nim’s pure and transparent soul!” he yelled.

I was already becoming even more anxious, and Park Deok-Gu’s ridiculous and confident remark didn’t help.

‘Stop it, you pig!’

I couldn’t help but take a step back when he made that unexpected remark.

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1. The author intentionally used Light instead of Lee since he has holy power ☜

CHAPTER 339
AFTEREFFECT (5)

'Stop raising her expectations for no reason.'

I immediately realized why Elena looked happy, and as she mentioned earlier, she could feel the kind of soul a person possessed. Park Deok-Gu used a simple analogy, but he wasn't wrong. It was the same as seeing, touching, and smelling, but saying that she possessed a sense that I couldn't understand was a better description. If I had to give an example, she could either be smelling a nice scent, tasting a delicious dish, or touching something nice. Elena seemed really touched by Kim Hyun-Sung and felt that Park Deok-Gu was very pure and transparent. She was basically surrounded by nice things, so of course, she was happy.

'I wonder if Han Sora will be okay.'

I was kind of worried, but I thought she would be fine. Even if Elena felt something from her, there should still be enough room to make something up, and in the end, there was no way she could detect the connection between her soul and her job. I had put in a lot of work with Jung Ha-Yan to hide the fact that Han Sora was a black mage. Moreover, even I brought in Kasugano Yuno to help us cover up many situations. As a result, not even the high priests noticed the fact that she was a black mage.

'Elena's attribute is legendary rank, but the specifics are still unknown.'

Han Sora had to be nervous after hearing the elf princess' remark about souls because she glanced at me, but I nodded to tell her that it was going to be fine. During all of this, Park Deok-Gu officially greeted her.

"Now that I think about it, I haven't officially introduced myself. I'm Park Deok-Gu of the Blue Guild."

"I was already aware of your name, Mr. Deok-Gu. I'm Elena Everia. It's truly an honor to be able to meet you."

"*Hm*, you even knew my name?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Of course. I should at least know the names of the heroes. I'm a bit embarrassed, but I know more than your names. I even know the things all of you had done…" Elena replied.

"You know that as well?" he asked.

"*Ah!* That's not what I meant. As I have mentioned before, I can only feel your soul. The reason I know all of you is that I have read many newspapers and magazines while I was in the kingdom," she answered.

"*Ah*, now that I think about it, many articles have been released about that day. Those articles must have reached your kingdom as well," he said.

"To be honest, our kingdom still prohibits bringing in goods from the Sacred Democratic Country and Laios, but I know the majority of the information regarding all of you. Some have been made into plays, and bards even sing praises of your achievements. The sacrifices and miracles you showed that day have become deeply rooted not only in Laios but in the hearts of the elves as well. It was really amazing. And… it was so majestic that I couldn't take my eyes off of the goddess' mirror. I haven't lived that long, but it was probably the most brilliant sight I have seen in my entire life," she explained.

"I-It's an honor to hear you say, even though I didn't really do much—*ahem*. Well, this is embarrassing. *Ah*, Sora here was a really huge help as well. If it weren't for her, I wouldn't have been able to endure it alone," Park Deok-Gu mentioned.

His embarrassment was out of character, but it was understandable for him to feel that way after hearing her words of praise. The sight of him changing the subject to Han Sora while blushing was an amusing sight to behold. Anyway, thanks to Park Deok-Gu's forced introduction, Han Sora took a step forward and introduced herself.

"I'm Han Sora."

"It's nice to meet you, Miss Han Sora. It's an honor to meet you," Elena greeted.

I was honestly worried about how she would react, but she didn't react any differently.

'Huh?'

Even though Han Sorah had turned over a new leaf, I was still surprised by how much she had changed. After all, I could still recall how much of a shitty person she was before. Elena's smile wasn't as big as when she saw Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deok-Gu, but she looked pretty happy as she bowed while smiling lightly. In addition, she even grabbed Han Sora's hand first, so I couldn't help but be surprised by how they were talking normally.

'I might be okay, too.'

I was certain that my soul was at least similar to Han Sora's soul—no, my soul was definitely better than hers. I knew better than anyone that my conscience had always been clear before God in my twenty-six years of living.

I was relieved to see Elena talking to Han Sora longer than Park Deok-Gu. After Elena was done spending some time with Han Sora, it was finally Jung Ha-Yan's turn. Kim Hyun-Sung introduced Jung Ha-Yan as if he was the host of the event, and another awkward introduction started.

"My name is Jung Ha-Yan."

"I-It's an honor. It's truly an honor," Elena stuttered.

She looked really happy when she met Park Deok-Gu and Han Sora, but when Jung Ha-Yan appeared, she looked like a fan who had just met her idol.

'No way... '

"Have you fully recovered?" she asked.

"Huh? *Oh*... yes," Jung Ha-Yan replied.

"L-Let me officially introduce myself. I'm sure you've already heard, but I'm Elena Everia. It was… really touching. How were you able to watch over the others while sacrificing yourself… The image of your martyred, noble figure will go down in the history of the continent," she said.

"Excuse me?" Jung Ha-Yan was dumbfounded.

“Whenever I remember that moment, I always feel like crying. I heard that it has been less than two years since you entered this continent, so how could you have such pure mana—*ah!* This isn’t the time for that—wait, no! It was really touching. I’m not even sure where I should start. I have a lot of things I want to say, but my mind is failing me. I’m sorry…” Elena apologized.

“No, i-it’s nothing to apologize for…” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

“If you don’t mind, could I shake your hand…” she requested.

“O-O-Of course…” Jung Ha-Yan replied.

“It’s an honor. It’s truly an honor. You’re exactly how I imagined you to be,” Elena said.

“I don’t understand… what you’re saying,” said Jung Ha-Yan.

‘I’m almost certain of it.’

I hadn’t been hallucinating. Elena’s face was still full of elegance, but her excitement made her look like a teenager. It could be considered a skill to be able to look that way despite being over 200 years old. When Elena held Jung Ha-Yan’s hand with excitement, Jung Ha-Yan looked as if she had no idea what to do.

I wasn’t sure, but the Princess of the Elf Kingdom was absorbed in our story. The majority of the denizens of Laios and the Sacred Democratic Country had a similar reaction to her, but her reaction was much bigger than theirs. It seemed like she had read through all the articles and magazine interviews related to us. Moreover, she even mentioned that she watched Jung Ha-Yan’s scenes several times through the goddess’ mirror, so I became confident that my assumption was correct. The denizens of Laios had actually seen us, so they were fine, but Elena was confined in an isolationist kingdom, and she only discovered us through the media. As such, it wouldn’t be strange if she had some sort of strange fantasy about us.

I had long gotten used to situations like this because of the denizens of Laios, but Jung Ha-Yan was stupefied by Elena’s sudden change in attitude. Jung Ha-Yan was bad at maintaining relationships with other people, so Jung Ha-Yan was confused when Elena started talking about things she couldn’t understand. Fortunately, Park Deok-Gu spoke for Jung Ha-Yan.

“So you’re saying that you’re surprised by Ha-Yan noonim’s transparent and pure soul, right?”

“That’s right, Mr. Park Deok-Gu. I can’t believe she’s filled with pure love. This is…” Elena trailed off.

“I knew it,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“I’m sorry if I offended you. I usually don’t say things like this, but you’re really…” she trailed off once again.

“As expected from our noonim. It’s like I told you. I have never seen anyone as pure and as nice as our noonim. When I first met her, I actually wondered how a person could be so nice, but after hearing you speak, I finally understand. The man next to our noonim is our hyung-nim. With the goddess’ mirror—”

“Yes, I already know. I remember his name very clearly. It is truly an honor, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” Elena interrupted.

“No, it’s my honor,” I responded.

“I-I should be thanking you instead of standing around like this,” Elena remarked.

“You have thanked us enough, Miss Elena. We didn’t do this to receive thanks, and you don’t have to bow as well,” I told her.

“No. I’m not thanking you for the things I mentioned earlier. Haven’t you rescued elves before?” she asked.

“*Ah!*”

“You may not remember it because it happened a long time ago, but at the time, I received news that you rescued our suffering children,” she continued.

“Now that I think about it—”

“So it was true. Thank you very much,” she said.

I saw her bowing from a little further away.

'Wow… I didn't expect that things would end up like this. This is why people should live a kind life on a daily basis.'

In the end, I profited from the good deed I had done in secret.

'This is karma! That's what I'm talking about!'

I wanted to maintain a good relationship with this elf, so I couldn't help but smile. I started to feel better while talking to her. Honestly, it didn't really matter how she felt about my soul, but the way she looked up at me showed that she wasn't suspicious of me at all. It was to the point that I felt dumb for being worried about it in the first place. In fact, things could have been better without this wheelchair.

"The children you saved back then are doing well. I wanted them to join the delegation, but they still feel uncomfortable about going outside. I'd like to thank you in their place," Elena informed.

"*Hahahaha.* I just did what a human being should do," I laughed.

"You're so modest. I was worried that my visit is too sudden. I had no idea that you're still having trouble walking…" Elena pointed out.

"*Cough, cough.* I'm fine. Many people are praying for me, so I'm recovering just fine. I'm just having a hard time breathing, so you really don't have to worry—*Cough*. I actually wanted to meet you in person, Princess. If you hadn't visited us, I probably would have visited you first," I told her.

"I appreciate that. I-If you don't mind, could I shake your hand…" she requested.

"Of course, Miss Elena," I replied.

Contrary to my expectation, the friendly atmosphere was maintained. When a heartwarming story was suddenly revealed, the others looked surprised. Who could have expected that I would discreetly use my powers to help the elves? Heartwarming stories like this were even more effective when they were revealed unintentionally, and Elena was overflowing with joy.

Demon Lord Belial used the adjective—disgusting—to describe me, but it definitely meant sacred because demons found sanctity disgusting.

Finally, Elena took a step forward.

"*Eurk—*"

'Huh?'

Elena had been expressing how much of a fan she was of ours by flapping her ears, but she suddenly frowned and started retching.

"*Oh*, I-I'm sorry. I'm suddenly—*eurk*. This is such bad manners… *Ah*, what's wrong with me? There's no way—*eurk*," Elena said while struggling to hold in her vomit.

'Wait… '

"*Eurk, eurk.*"

'What's wrong with you? Shit… '

"W-Wait. *Whoo*…" she stuttered and took a deep breath.

'Hold on. This is too much… '

"*Bleeeeeeeeck.*"

Elena's next action wasn't in my calculations at all.

CHAPTER 340
AFTEREFFECT (6)

“You look happy, Lady Elena,” Ludwig commented.

“How could I[1] not be? I’m about to meet the heroes who saved Laios and basically the entire continent. It's an honor to see them in real life when I have only ever seen them through the goddess’ mirror. *Oh!* Look over there, Ludwig. It was true that a statue is being constructed,” I replied.

“Yes, I see it.”

“The warrior in the very front is Mr. Park Deok-Gu, the mage is Miss Han Sora, and the two in the middle are Miss Jung Ha-Yan and Mr. Lee Ki-Young. You know them as well, right? They’re the heroes who stopped the demon’s magic that was falling on the city that day. *Ahh*. They look so majestic. We have to honor their achievements in our kingdom as well. I asked Father and Mother, but all they said was that they would think about it and didn’t seem all that interested—*ah!* Did you know? Ludwig? About Father Lee Ki-Young. His devotion has made him highly regarded as the person the Benigoa Goddess has bestowed upon the continent,” I explained.

“I see,” Ludwig commented.

“In the article directly published by the Vatican, the life of the Honorary Cardinal, Lee Ki-Young, was described as a struggle against darkness. He encountered a foreigner who was a demon worshiper, and after stopping the Republican’s plan to summon a demon themselves, he could well be an apostle sent by the Goddess of Benigoa. No! Not just the goddess, but he could be the apostle Elune has bestowed upon us as well. Regardless of the reason, we managed to get in contact with him, even though it’s through an official matter…” I continued.

The more I thought about it, the more I agreed with my hypotheses.

“Can you believe that Father and Mother directly ordered us to push ahead with the Three Nation Alliance? If you think about it, Father Lee Ki-Young is the one who bridged us together. Destiny—as if it was destiny,” I added.

“Lady Elena, I understand your excitement, but…”

“I know. I always remember what my mother and father have told me,” I interrupted.

“I’m glad to hear that, but you have to avoid getting involved with them personally as much as possible,” he warned.

“Yes, I know, Ludwig. But—”

“No buts, Lady Elena. Please behave yourself in the castle and refrain from contacting them as much as possible. They’re heroes, but you have to keep in mind that they’re humans as well,” he added.

“But our children were saved by Father Lee Ki-Young…” I pointed out.

“*Sigh*…”

“Not all humans are the same, Ludwig. I understand how you’re feeling, but I trust them. I’m sure there’s someone among them with a pure soul. They aren’t bad people. Think about what happened in Laios that day. They didn’t get scared and run away. They stood their ground and faced the demon’s threat. An elf or even other races wouldn’t have been able to act like them,” I pointed out

“…”

“I know what you’re worried about, but it’s not good to carelessly speak ill of the heroes who saved the continent,” I added.

“Looks like I made a mistake, Lady Elena. My apologies,” Ludwig apologized.

“No, you shouldn’t apologize to me. Looks like we’re almost there,” I said, pointing out.

“Yes…”

“I can finally meet them. I don’t know how I should express my feelings,” I told him.

“You don’t have to be nervous,” said Ludwig.

“Yes, I know.”

Ludwig told me not to be nervous, but I couldn't stop myself from shaking because my heart kept pounding against my chest. I was about to meet the heroes who saved the continent, so I was naturally nervous.

'Feeling out of it is the perfect description.'

After arriving at the castle, we were greeted by the denizens and the key figures of Laios, but I didn't notice the quick passing of time. I told myself that I had to be composed, but I was thirsty, and I also didn't even notice the scenery around me.

That was when Ludwig spoke to me worriedly…

"Lady Elena, are you fine?"

"I-I'm fine, Ludwig. Can you get me something to drink?" I requested.

"Yes, of course… I'll bring you something right away," he replied.

"Do I look strange right now?" I asked.

"Not at all. You look like your usual self, Lady Elena," he answered.

"How much longer until I meet the heroes of light…" I asked.

"I heard that they're currently waiting in the meeting room," he answered.

"What? T-They're waiting?" I stuttered.

"They arrived earlier than we had expected," he told me.

"I'll head straight to the meeting room. It's rude to make them wait," I said.

"As you wish," he said.

Obviously, my nervousness caused me to walk faster, and although my heart started racing again, I couldn't make the heroes wait until I was composed enough to face them.

When the door to the meeting room opened, my mind went blank. I tried my best to control myself, but I couldn't even understand what I was saying. I couldn't help it

because the heroes I had been longing to see were exactly how I had imagined them to be. There was Mr. Park Deok-Gu, who stopped many demons, Miss Han Sora, who never stopped casting spells, and the two people in the back were probably Miss Jung Ha-Yan and Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I couldn't really see them because Mr. Park Deok-Gu's large frame was covering them, but I thought it would be best to take my time greeting them. I felt like my heart was going to burst just standing in front of them like this.

'How can someone be so pure?'

When I saw Mr. Park Deok-Gu, I was unknowingly surprised. He had a pure, spotless soul, which was also honest and transparent. He was like an innocent child. I was kind of surprised when he asked a random question, but I couldn't help but smile when he apologized immediately afterward.

I got sort of a different feeling from Miss Han Sora.

'She's really small and weak.'

She seemed frightened, and she looked so unstable that she seemed like she could collapse at any moment.

'But how... despite being in such a condition... '

How did she never think about giving up her life so easily? How did she manage to stand up against a large demon with that small and weak soul of hers? It was a feat not just anyone could do. It was obvious she needed a lot of courage to stand up against the demon. When I recalled how she grabbed her trembling legs and faced the demon, I couldn't help but cry, but the soul I saw after Miss Han Sora's caused my jaw to drop.

'Miss Jung Ha-Yan!

It was her. The archmage who coughed up blood and kept on using casting her magic while being enveloped in light. She had already caught my eyes when I saw her through the goddess' mirror, but I realized after seeing her personally that she was an even more amazing person.

'No way... '

The way her soul was filled with love made her look like a strange person. I had never felt a soul that was as big and overwhelming as hers. I couldn't feel anything else. Jealousy, anger, happiness, sadness. It was like all the raw emotions a person could feel were tied into one mind, and I couldn't help but be in awe of her. Even an adult who had trained their mind for tens of thousands of years wouldn't be able to cultivate that kind of soul, and the subject of her love was obvious.

'Father Lee Ki-Young. It's him. That's… really him.'

My heart dropped when I saw him sitting in a wheelchair, but I felt kind of relieved when I heard that he was fine. My heart started pounding when he said that he wanted to meet me, but something was strange.

'I don't feel anything.'

I started talking to him just in case, but nothing changed. His soul felt extremely normal. My suspicion only lasted for a moment, and when I took a step forward to shake his hand…

'What's this?'

"*Euuurrrkkk.*"

A disgusting lump of soul started to fill me up, and I had no idea how to explain it. I couldn't understand how an adult like him possessed this kind of soul. It wasn't a frightening or evil soul. It was a pure soul, yet it was ridiculously disgusting that I got goosebumps on my back.

I wanted to leave, but I couldn't stop myself from throwing up despite my best efforts. I immediately bent down and vomited.

"*Cough… cough*."

"Mr. Ki-Young."

"*Cough. Cough, cough.* I-I—" Mr. Lee Ki-Young started talking.

"Mr. Ki-Young, are you okay?"

"P-Priest… please…" he requested.

“Mr. Ki-Young! Right now!”

“H-Hyung-nim. W-What’s going on? H-Hurry and call Hee-Young noonim!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

“Oppa, oppa!” Jung Ha-Yan called out.

The man in front of me suddenly grabbed his chest and collapsed. The others gathered around him as he tried to catch his breath.

“A seizure. He’s having a seizure!” Kim Hyun-Sung cried out.

“*Heuuuuuuung.* Oppa… *Hiccup*. Oppa!” Jung Ha-Yan cried.

“Don’t touch him, Miss Ha-Yan. It’ll make things worse if you touch him. Miss Hye-Jin, please summon the medical team right away,” Kim Hyun-Sung ordered.

“A seizure. What are you talking about, bro?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“It’s an aftereffect,” replied Kim Hyun-Sung.

“What do you…”

“It’s an aftereffect of that demon summoning incident…” Kim Hyun-Sung trailed off.

“What?! What are you talking about all of a sudden? And what’s this aftereffect you’re talking about?! Hyung-nim told us that his sickness from last time wasn’t a big deal!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

“Mr. Ki-Young didn’t want anyone else to know. I’ll explain later, Mr. Deok-Gu,” he revealed.

“W-We shouldn’t just leave him like this. We should pour mana…” Park Deok-Gu suggested.

“Mana can’t resolve something like this. This is…” Kim Hyun-Sung paused.

“No! No! Oppa, oppa!!!” Jung Ha-Yan screamed.

“He’ll be fine. I’m sure he’ll be fine,” said Kim Hyun-Sung.

The sudden change in the situation dumbfounded me, but the disgusting soul's smell was so strong it still lingered in the air.

'What's going on… '

The priests and the medical team finally arrived in the meeting room. Miss Jung Ha-Yan was crying, and Miss Han Sora looked anxious. Mr. Park Deok-Gu and Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung looked extremely depressed. I thought that Mr. Lee Ki-Young would recover sooner or later, but the way he quivered as he moaned in pain made me think that his condition wasn't improving. A small hypothesis popped up in my head. Perhaps…

"The h-holy power isn't working. I'm certain his condition is normal…" said the priest.

"Aren't you a priest? H-Hurry up and do something! Save our hyung-nim!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

"His body is definitely normal. I-It's my first time seeing a seizure like this…" the priest confessed.

"*Heeeeeeung*. Oppaaa… *Heeeeeeung*," Jung Ha-Yan continued crying.

Perhaps…

It was Elune's divine guidance that I met the warriors of light.

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1. Elena's POV ☜

CHAPTER 341
AFTEREFFECT (7)

The voices around me[1] told me the urgency of the situation, and I could see everyone's shocked faces as well. In an instant, the room became filled with noises, causing the leader of the Sacred Democratic Country and Miss Pristina to barge into the meeting room. We obviously didn't greet each other because they immediately joined the group checking Mr. Lee Ki-Young's condition.

The holy power of the Democratic Country's high priests filled the room, and the people among them were acting differently. Some were praying while others were watching the situation worriedly. Mr. Park Deok-Gu continued talking to the high priest while Miss Jung Ha-Yan kept crying, which made them look desperate. The others looked anxious as well.

"*Guuuuh. Heeeeeung.* Oppaa…" Jung Ha-Yan cried.

"H-He'll be fine. I'm certain. Calm down," Park Deok-Gu told her.

"*Heeeeeeung. Hiccup.* No. I don't like thiiisss…" she continued.

"Hey, doctor, is there no way to fix this? He's in so much pain! It doesn't make sense that his condition is normal," Park Deok-Gu yelled.

"His condition is normal. I'm certain of it. His condition is normal, but… I can't find the cause. I think pouring in holy magic is the only way for now. I heard he was experiencing aftereffects, but I had never imagined that he would be in this much pain. F-Father Lee Ki-Young kept saying that he was fine as well…" the priest explained.

"And you believed him?! He doesn't look normal at all! You believed what he said despite knowing his personality?" Park Deok-Gu complained.

"I-I'm really sorry, Mr. Park Deok-Gu. I'm doing my best, but… Father Lee Ki-Young…" the priest trailed off.

“You shouldn’t be apologizing to me! You need to find out what’s causing him this pain!” he said.

“Calm down, Mr. Deok-Gu. Yelling won’t solve the issue,” Kim Hyun-Sung intercepted.

“S-So what do you want us to do, Hyun-Sung bro? We need to know what’s causing him pain so that we can do something about it. O-Of course, that isn’t something I can do… But I need to know what’s going on as well,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“I don’t know the details either other than the fact that he has been experiencing aftereffects after that day… Realistically speaking, it’d be strange if he didn’t experience any sequela. Because he used so much mana with that body of his, I’m sure the sequela is much worse for him than Miss Ha-Yan. He’s going to look like he’s fine on the outside, but it’s highly likely that the shock and fatigue have stacked up in him,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

“So how did he normally…”

“Mr. Ki-Young was able to recover because of his special inherent quality. He has a special condition that makes his mana carry holy power. I feel bad about not telling you this ahead of time. It’s because he wanted me to keep this a secret from you and Miss Ha-Yan… I’m really sorry,” Kim Hyun-Sung apologized.

“I-It’s fine. It’s not something you need to apologize for. If hyung-nim told me that, I would have done the same thing. H-Hyung-nim probably thought that he had to endure it because he doesn’t want to be a burden when we’re so busy dealing with important things,” Park Deok-Gu added.

“…”

“I’m sure he kept it to himself because he didn’t want others to worry about him. He probably acted calm, like there was nothing wrong despite holding onto his chest every day. He had always been in pain, but he didn’t want us to worry, so he endured it while smiling,” he continued.

“…”

“*Ugh*… If only I could be in pain for him… I want to do that for him, at the very least. Even if someone beats me to death, I can’t watch hyung-nim in pain like this,” he muttered.

“I understand. I feel the same way…” Kim Hyun-Sung remarked.

“Shit, shit!”

Mr. Park Deok-Gu clenched his fist as he turned his back to Mr. Lee Ki-Young.

‘I was right.’

At first, it was just a simple suspicion of mine, but the more I listened to their conversation, the more I became certain of my suspicion. Naturally, I stood up while nodding. I wasn’t sure about anything yet, but if Father Lee Ki-Young had truly received divine guidance from the Goddess of Benigoa and Elune, then I could have received some sort of guidance as well. The fact that I could see them in this meeting room in Laios right now could be a huge guidance bestowed upon me that had to be pierced together like a puzzle.

‘That’s right.’

No matter how much I thought about it, it was the only conclusion I could come up with. Of course, I wasn’t sure whether I was right or not. However, the disgusting smell was getting worse. I could have misunderstood it, but I didn’t have time to think about it properly because the soul of the hero, who was grabbing onto his chest in pain, was getting faint. Actually, even the parts of his soul with the smallest light peeking out earlier had already been engulfed in darkness.

“Please give us a room. I’ll…” I requested.

“What?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I may have a way,” I told him.

“What are you talking about? Just now you… Now that I think about it, after you saw hyung-nim…” Park Deok-Gu trailed off.

“I’m not certain. It’s just a simple assumption, but there could be an issue with… his soul,” I said.

“What in the world are you talking about? Y-You can perceive that as well?” he asked.

“It’s like I said. It’s difficult to say that his current condition is simply because of the

aftereffects of what he had done. If there isn't anything wrong with his body, then it may not be a physical wound. It applies even more if the high priests of the Sacred Democratic Country haven't caught on to it yet," I explained.

"Not a physical wound… Are you saying that his s-soul is wounded?" he asked.

"That's what I think so far. I don't know if it's something I can help with, but if we leave him like this, I'm sure there will be problems. He could collapse if we don't do anything," I replied.

"Please explain it in a way that's easier for me to understand," he requested.

"To say that he has been tainted is the best way to describe it," I told him.

"Tainted?" he questioned.

"That's right. He has been tainted to the point that I can't even begin to describe it. He was probably tainted when he faced that demon and resisted its power that day…" I answered.

"Is that the reason why you vomited just now, elf princess?" he asked.

"I'm… embarrassed, but that's right," I replied.

"No, it's nothing for you to be embarrassed about because it means hyung-nim's condition is that bad. I-I understand. By the way, what will happen if there's something wrong with the soul?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I haven't seen anyone collapsing after being tainted, but it's very likely that his body will start to collapse. When the water in a pond stagnates, the surrounding area will also be affected. That's his current condition. He's probably going through an unimaginably painful process of collapse," I said.

"T-Then do something. Hurry! Please help hyung-nim!" he begged.

I nodded in response, and the heroes stepped back as they looked at me with expectation and suspicion. It was understandable. I was sad, but even I thought I sounded ridiculous just now.

"If something goes wrong or if he shows any other signs…"

“I understand why you’re being suspicious, but I’m here as a representative of the Everia Kingdom, not to cause harm to the heroes. If you see me trying to harm Mr. Lee Ki-Young, you can cut my head off,” I told Park Deok-Gu.

“Lady Elena, that’s…!” Ludwig chimed in.

“It’ll be fine, Ludwig. Don’t worry. Everything will be fine. I think I know why I came here. I’m certain Elune has guided me here,” I said.

The indescribably disgusting energy assaulted me every time I took a step forward toward Mr. Lee Ki-Young. However, I had to keep calm while biting my lips. I was sure that the hero in front of me was suffering more than anyone of us right now. He had a noble soul that had been resisting the demon until it rotted away.

‘He’s suffering.’

It was so disgusting that it felt like my soul was rotting away as well, and it was surprising that there was still purity left in Mr. Lee Ki-Young’s soul despite his situation. It was difficult for me to figure out what his soul was originally like. I shook my head as much as I could when I started to feel dizzy, and as I stood in front of Mr. Lee Ki-Young, I saw his miserable appearance. He had to be finding it hard to breathe because he kept gasping for breath, and there were tears in his bloodshot eyes. He bit his lips to endure the pain, but I could hear his painful whimpering. Moreover, his incessantly trembling legs and his twisted body were enough to reveal his distress. His current appearance didn’t make him seem like he was the hero who stood his ground in the face of that gigantic demon. The hero of light, who had been holding it in even though his body was breaking apart, was in so much pain his tainted soul was dripping tears of blood.

How…

How could he be so noble? How could a human be so selfless and holy?

In case I got worried, Mr. Lee Ki-Young held his scream in and nodded as if he was telling me that he was okay. I started crying without realizing it.

I slowly placed my hand on his chest. I felt like I was touching rotten maggots, but after biting my lips again, I placed my other hand on top of the other.

‘It’s not disgusting or dirty.’

I wasn't sure if it was effective, but I continued expelling the energy in his body because I had to stop it from completely devouring his soul.

'Elune, I know you guided me here because of this noble soul. This servant of yours is asking you to bestow upon me the power that can save this person's soul. I beg you. Please. Even if I have to sacrifice everything I have, I won't abandon him.'

I kept my hand on his chest while doing my best not to mind the creepy feeling.

"*Ah!*"

His breathing started to calm down. The trembling of his legs started to abate, and his twisted back started to recover as well. The suffering hero was no longer there. He actually checked his body with a surprised look before staring at me.

'It was divine guidance. I was right!'

[An Epic-Ranked Forced Quest has been activated.]

[My precious daughter… Run… (0/1)]

[The Epic-Ranked Forced Quest has been canceled for an unknown reason.]

However, there was something going on that I couldn't quite understand.

[A Legendary-Ranked Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Fulfillment of a Divine Guidance (0/1)]

I finally realized my role…

"Hyung-nim! Hyung-nim!" Mr. Park Deok-Gu yelled.

“Oppa, oppa. *Heeeeuk*,” Miss Jung Ha-Yan called out to him.

As a loud cheer erupted around me, I couldn’t help but smile.

“Thank you, Elune.”

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1. Elena’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 342
THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF (1)

'It was a passionate performance. Shit!'

I[1] had lied many times throughout my life, but I was even surprised by my acting this time. I was so focused that my entire body was covered in sweat, and I had poured my entire soul into the performance. In addition, I actually started to feel pain in the middle of it, so when I rolled my eyes as if I was really in pain, I saw Elena looking at me with tears in her eyes. The others had the same reactions. I felt like I exaggerated a bit, but it was an appropriate decision to make. It would have been fine to end it on a brief seizure, but since it was a sensitive time, I couldn't just let it end on a brief seizure because a discarded cigarette could eventually become a large fire. My performance just now was just a way to extinguish the small fire.

'Great. It's great! This is the Light Ki-Young I'm talking about. Indeed.'

Light Ki-Young had to remain as Light Ki-Young, and this shield had to be maintained. I wanted to praise myself for being able to get out of a crisis through my wits and skilled acting; however, I couldn't help but feel bitter about this happiness. Belial's 'man with a disgusting soul' description suited me perfectly. I tried to comfort myself by saying that it wasn't me, but based on the situation, I couldn't deny it.

'But I wasn't disgusting to the point that she had to vomit… '

I was kind of hurt.

'It was really rude of her to vomit.'

However, I immediately shook my head. Even if my soul were pure, it wasn't like the transcendent being would reward me for it. Anyway, the good thing was that Elena didn't seem suspicious of me, and actually, she seemed like she trusted me completely. Her face showed that she was worried about me, and although she looked like she was suffering just by being next to me, she was smiling. Unfortunately, I couldn't appreciate her face for a long time because I had to take the brunt of Jung Ha-Yan's body slam.

"*Heuuuuuuuung.* Oppa, oppaaaa…" Jung Ha-Yan cried.

Jung Ha-Yan had to have been really shocked by what just happened because her face was covered in tears and snot. Park Deok-Gu looked the same, and Kim Hyun-Sung was also holding his chest while breathing deeply.

Naturally, I started talking bullshit again, but it wasn't anything serious. I played dumb earlier, so I had to pretend like I was trying to figure out what was going on.

"What's… going on?" I asked.

"H-Hyung-nim, are you really okay?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"*Ah*… Yeah, I'm okay, Deok-Gu," I answered.

"Are you sure? You're really not in pain?" he asked.

"I'm fine. I'm really okay. I'm sorry for making you worry and for hiding it from you…" I replied.

"*Kghh*…"

"…"

I felt embarrassed to see that Park Deok-Gu was about to cry again. He had to be choking up because he was holding it in without talking. When I saw everyone else, I couldn't help but think that I shouldn't do this again. Many people had gathered because of the situation, and I saw Oscar's worried face as well.

"Are you awake, Father Lee Ki-Young?" Oscar asked.

"Yes, the pain isn't so bad anymore. I've shown everyone something I shouldn't have. I feel like an idiot. *Haha*," I replied.

"You don't have to say that," she commented.

"By the way Miss Oscar, just now…"

"Princess Elena of the Everia Kingdom helped us," she answered.

“Miss Elena… helped?” I asked.

I looked surprised because I had no idea how Light Ki-Young’s pain, whose soul was being tortured by the demon, went away.

Oscar got up slowly and bowed to Elena. I looked even more surprised at that.

“I wasn’t able to greet you properly because of the urgent situation. I’m Oscar, Miss Elena. The Sacred Democratic Country will not forget the help you provided us today. Thank you once again,” Oscar said.

“I’m Elena Everia, and there’s no need to bow to me, Miss Oscar. I just did what was right. I didn’t do it expecting a reward. I did it to help the hero, and it was my calling,” Elena explained.

“What do you mean…” I asked.

“Father Lee Ki-Young, Miss Elena was the one who helped you with your dangerous condition,” Oscar answered.

“Really?” I questioned.

When I asked, I saw Elena looking at me.

“That’s right. I don’t know what happened, but I’m the one who stabilized your condition,” she replied.

“How did you—could you explain how you did it?” I asked.

“Of course, Father. This will sound ridiculous, but please listen carefully and don’t misunderstand,” she requested.

“Alright…”

I nodded, and Elena continued talking. It didn’t completely match my assumptions, but there were some parts where I was correct. This was basically what happened: I was suffering from an aftereffect from that day, but it had already been treated. Elena was talking about the soul or whatever, and the priests of the Sacred Democratic Country had to have thought that it was possible because they were nodding as she spoke.

'Not bad.'

Since there wasn't anything wrong with my body, it was only right to turn our attention to something else. To them, saying that there was something wrong with my soul would sound ridiculous, but the people here saw how I actually recovered, so it was understandable for them to nod in agreement. I wasn't the only one who knew about the high elves' legacy, and at this point, I was sure that they were thinking about it as well.

Anyway, as Elena continued her explanation, more and more people started nodding, including myself.

"It's hard to believe, but… that explains it," I commented.

"It's not an exaggeration to say that your soul is on the brink of collapsing, and I have never seen such a pure soul before…" Elena muttered.

"Now that you are done treating me, how is it now?" I asked.

"I didn't treat you, Father Lee Ki-Young," she replied.

"What?"

"I merely alleviated your pain. I'm sorry for disappointing you, but I haven't done any sort of treatment. Your soul is still weakening, and… my weak powers couldn't quickly drive out the disgusting energy that had enveloped your soul. First aid. Yes, it was simply first aid. Compared to before, nothing has changed," she explained.

And that was when Kim Hyun-Sung finally spoke up because this was an important matter to him.

"Are you saying that he'll continue to have seizures?"

"I don't want to disappoint you, but it's highly likely. Of course, with proper treatment and care, his condition will improve a little bit, but I'm not even sure about that… I think it'll be best to find another way. I don't want to tell you this, but he may not have a lot of time," Elena replied.

"T-Then what's going to happen to hyung-nim? Are you saying that he has to continue living like this? No, are you saying that he could die?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"…"

"…"

"I'm sure that's not the case, Deok-Gu. My condition is improving little by little…" I chimed in.

"How do you know that? Something like this may happen again one day. *Uh*… M-Miss Elena, I'm sorry to ask this, but can't you watch over him every time he's in pain? I-I'll do anything you want. P-Please…" Park Deok-Gu begged.

"That's impossible."

The one that answered Park Deok-Gu's absurd question was the princess's attendant, and it was an obvious answer. Even if my life depended on it, Elena was a noble high elf born after a thousand years, and she was the princess of a kingdom as well. As such, it was out of the question for her to become the healer of a scum's soul.

'I prefer it this way as well.'

If that woman were to remain by my side, I could experience many difficulties. I had to deal with Jung Ha-Yan, and I didn't want her to catch me doing something bad. Regardless, the Everia Kingdom wouldn't just let Elena stay here.

As expected, her attendant continued talking, "Princess Elena has to protect our kingdom."

"B-But…"

"He's right, Deok-Gu. You shouldn't ask for an unreasonable request. After all, we all have our own responsibilities to handle. Please disregard Deok-Gu's request. I'm sorry for putting all of you in an uncomfortable situation," I said.

"That's not true, Father Lee Ki-Young," Elena said.

"Excuse me?"

I knew something was wrong the moment I saw the determined look on Elena's face.

"I won't return to the kingdom," she announced.

“What?” I asked.

“As per Mr. Park Deok-Gu’s request, I’ll remain by Father Lee Ki-Young’s side and look after his wound. I can’t let the hero of light just die like this,” she continued.

“Lady Elena!” Ludwig called out.

“I have already made my decision, Ludwig. I’ll tell my mother and father the same thing. I’ll stay by his side,” she repeated.

‘What is this nonsense?’

“You can’t do that…” Ludwig muttered.

“It’s not something my mother or anyone can decide for me. If my position is the reason why I can’t stay by his side, then I’ll gladly give it up. I’m sure you understand what I mean,” she told him.

“Please refrain from making such harsh remarks, Lady Elena. Do you understand what you’re saying right now?” Ludwig asked.

“Ludwig, my position isn’t important to me,” she said.

“How…”

“I received divine guidance. I wasn’t hallucinating. I really received Elune’s guidance. Even someone like me has a role to play on this crisis-stricken continent. It’s no coincidence that I came here,” she added.

“…”

“…”

The sight of the two elves staring at each other created a heavy atmosphere.

‘What is this divine guidance she’s talking about?’

I had no idea what she was talking about, and she seemed to have misunderstood something. I was even more shocked because I wasn’t sure if such an arrangement would be beneficial to me.

“I came here to save you, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Elena concluded.

‘Crazy… ’

It was a ridiculous sight to see her bowing toward me. I wasn’t sure what she meant by *divine guidance*, but I was certain that she would make things complicated for me.

‘My head hurts… ah… ’

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1. Lee Ki-Young’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 343
THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF (2)

I didn't have the luxury to grab my aching head. After the ridiculous incident, the situation immediately changed. After calming down Elena, who kept saying that she would follow me around, silence filled the room.

"I don't know anything about divine guidance or what's going on, but basically, you're saying that hyung-nim could die, right?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

Jung Ha-Yan's cries intensified, and I could hear whispers around me. Kim Hyun-Sung also seemed really disturbed, and the way he bit his lips was the same as last time.

'Did I overdo it?'

I was suddenly filled with great regret. The determined-looking Princess Elena was soon taken away by her attendants, and the room became even quieter as a result.

'This isn't what I wanted. This isn't good… '

Kim Hyun-Sung broke the ice and said, "Could all of you leave for a moment? I need to speak with Mr. Lee Ki-Young. *Ah*, you can stay, Mr. Deok-Gu. Miss Hye-Jin, please take care of Miss Ha-Yan," he requested.

It would definitely be a serious conversation. The members of the Blue Guild, the priests, and even Oscar left the room. Since he wanted Park Deok-Gu to stay, he definitely wanted to convince me about something somehow, but I wasn't fond of this kind of conversation.

"W-What should we do? Isn't it better that we keep asking her?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"…"

"…"

“It doesn’t make sense. Why would the princess of a kingdom want to dedicate herself to treating me? Even if it’s what she wanted, I’m sure Everia will find this an issue. Don’t worry too much about it. The same goes for you, Mr. Hyun-Sung. Don’t worry about what we talked about just now,” I told them.

“It’s not that simple, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Hyun-Sung bro is right. It’s not something we can decide so easily. Whether we kneel or think of a different way, to let Miss Elena treat you is the right thing to do for now,” Park Deok-Gu commented.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” I said.

“It’s not ridiculous,” Kim Hyun-Sung chimed in.

‘Shit… ’

I felt bad for Park Deok-Gu, who was talking while crying, but I couldn’t let Elena stay beside me. Kim Hyun-Sung continued to look at me in a serious way. He looked as if he was trying to find a way, but he had to be having a hard time because he was frowning. It was because he somewhat agreed with what I said. If things went wrong, it could cause issues for the Three Nation Alliance. Of course, I could simply be overinterpreting it, but the smallest incident could truly change a political relationship.

“Can’t we let her stay here? The elf princess herself said that she’ll remain here, so what’s the problem?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I told you, it’s not that simple,” I answered.

“I don’t know anything about it being a simple issue or whatever! How is that issue a big deal when you’re about to die? If the Sacred Democratic Country submits an official request asking the princess to look after you for a few months, I’m sure they’ll accept it,” he added.

‘This pig. Just stop.’

“*Kgh…*”

“You pig…” I said.

“You need to change how you think as well, hyung-nim. You have to think about the others, too. Is this really the time to be worried about other things? You should think about getting treated first!” he yelled.

“Park Deok-Gu! Do you have any idea how we made this meeting happen?” I asked.

I was about to lecture him, but Kim Hyun-Sung intervened.

“No, there’s no need to make her stay here.”

“What do you mean?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Mr. Ki-Young can go to the Everia Kingdom instead,” he replied.

“What?”

‘Shit… ’

I almost cursed out loud.

‘Damn it.’

“So… what you’re saying is…”

“That’s right. I think it’ll be best if you head to the Everia Kingdom. Asking Lady Elena to stay in Laios will certainly cause issues, but sending you to the Everia Kingdom shouldn’t cause any issues,” he answered.

“Are you being serious?” I asked.

“I am. Of course, this isn’t the best time to do this, but right now, your recovery is the top priority. To do that, this is the most reasonable method,” he replied.

“But still, leaving at a time like this…” I muttered.

“I’m sure nothing will happen, Mr. Ki-Young. I understand how you’re feeling, but…” he trailed off.

“But this is…”

'Shit. I don't need to get treated for anything, so why are they making such a big deal out of it? Looks like my plan is going to be completely ruined… '

With great lies comes great responsibility.[1] My head started to hurt due to the many issues I would have to face, and it felt like I made the situation worse. Even if it would affect the alliance, forcing the elf to stay here would be better than me leaving for the Everia Kingdom, but the part that gave me the biggest headache was the fact that I would be apart from Kim Hyun-Sung. Even if I was no longer part of his list of suspects, I wasn't happy about going to the Everia Kingdom. I couldn't help but feel nervous when I imagined how he would investigate many different places while I was gone.

'No way. I won't leave.'

I spoke confidently, but their reactions were cold.

"There's no need to do this, Mr. Hyun-Sung."

"No, Mr. Ki-Young. I understand that you want to stay here and observe the situation until the end, but your health comes first," Kim Hyun-Sung replied.

"I'm really fine…" I commented.

"How could you say that after having a seizure like that? How can I trust you? You saying that you're okay doesn't mean that you're okay! I understand that you're worried about many things, but your health is the most important. Yeah, that's the right thing to do! Hyung-nim, once the Three Nation Alliance is established, the Everia Kingdom will open up, and you'll be able to go to the place where the elves live," Park Deok-Gu explained.

'Shit!'

"No, I'm really okay. There's nothing wrong with me. And—"

"No, Mr. Ki-Young. I won't accept any objections this time. You're going to Everia no matter what," Kim Hyun-Sung interrupted.

"What? What do you…" I asked.

"It's exactly what I said. In addition, everyone in the Blue Guild, including myself, are

planning on going to Everia as well," he answered.

"Wait… what…"

I couldn't help but look at him.

'Is this guy crazy?'

Of course, I was happy about it because regardless of the reason, I would be able to stay with Kim Hyun-Sung. However, when I recalled his personal to-do list, I couldn't say that he was making a reasonable decision here.

'Does he know that we're in an important period right now?'

There were many foreign affairs to handle, but Kim Hyun-Sung had just found some tracks to track down the brigade and the masked scum. They were just a bit further away from him, so it was understandable for him to feel frustrated because I was holding him back. Despite all that, he was still willing to go to Everia together.

'No wonder he got backstabbed a few times.'

After weighing the importance between the masked scum and me, he decided that I was more important. I knew the death of his comrades had traumatized him, but it seemed worse than I had imagined. He even postponed the handling of many political issues so that he could completely focus on me, so I couldn't help but exclaim at his soft-heartedness.

'This is why people backstabbed you… '

But unlike my thoughts, I was all smiles. There were still issues, but I managed to avoid the worst-case scenario. Going together was better than going there on my own, and I felt even happier because it seemed that Kim Hyun-Sung had finally realized how I was feeling. The fact that he would protect me meant that I would be even safer than before.

"No, there's no need. There's no need for you to go as well, Mr. Hyun-Sung…" I said.

"No! That's the right thing to do. It's not just him. All the other Blue Guild members are going as well!" Park Deok-Gu chimed in.

“But considering our situation—”

“Please forget about everything else for now. You have to focus on recovering,” Kim Hyun-Sung ordered.

“…”

“I’m sure you’ll be able to recover,” he added.

‘No, I’m sure that’s impossible.’

I would be lucky if my condition didn’t worsen. No matter what Elena would do, I knew better than anyone that it wouldn’t affect me. The fact that the condition hadn’t even appeared on the surface was a problem.

‘I’m sure she’ll notice… ’

It would be a relief if Big Ears kept on misdiagnosing my condition, but if a small issue were to occur, it could put me in an annoying situation. Even if I acted like my condition was improving, that wouldn’t be the case for my soul.

‘What should I do about this?’

I had no choice but to deal with it, and I became curious about something. I understood Kim Hyun-Sung, Park Deok-Gu, and Jung Ha-Yan coming with me, but I didn’t understand why everyone in the guild had to come as well. I didn’t know what Kim Hyun-Sung was thinking. If he were really worried about me, he would either come with me by himself or send either Jung Ha-Yan or Park Deok-Gu with me. Moreover, sending everyone in the guild with me was a waste of manpower as well as an unreasonable decision to make.

Kim Hyun-Sung had to have realized that I was curious because he muttered.

“I’m not sure yet, but…”

“*Hm*?”

“Maybe we can get your body back to normal,” Kim Hyun-Sung continued.

“What? What do you—”

“Really?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yes, but I can’t guarantee it just yet, and I still have no idea if it’s even possible,” he replied.

“Are you saying that hyung-nim’s body will return to normal?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“If it succeeds,” he replied.

“You mean hyung-nim won’t die?” he questioned.

‘Shit… ’

Anxiety started to fill me up in me because I had no idea what treatment method he was talking about. This could just be a ridiculous assumption of mine, but they could ask me to drink spring water that could treat the soul. Of course, it wouldn’t heal my soul.

In the end, I still wouldn’t be able to avoid being suspicious. I was nervous about whether Kim Hyun-Sung would go with me or not, but if I had a choice, I would choose the former. Unfortunately, it wouldn’t mean that the situation couldn’t get any worse.

‘What should I do? Shit. What do I do?’

When I grabbed my head, the regressor patted my shoulder.

“I promise you once again. I won’t let you die no matter what, Mr. Ki-Young.”

I had no idea how long I had this *deadly* disease, but out of all the expressions I had seen from him, he looked the most enthusiastic here.

‘I’m not going to die, man. I’m going to live until I become senile.’

---

1. It's a quote from Spider-Man. "With great powers comes great responsibility" ☜

CHAPTER 344
THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF (3)

'I'm going to live until I become senile.'

Obviously, I couldn't say that out loud because the situation could become worse if I revealed my will to live.

"Hyun-Sung bro is right. We won't let you die, hyung-nim," Park Deok-Gu said.

'Shit.'

"The seizure is only temporary, Mr. Hyun-Sung. Other than that, I'm really healthy," I told him.

It seemed like no one wanted to believe me when I said I was feeling fine because I kept on lying. I finally understood the feelings of the shepherd boy in the fairy tale. I wanted to do whatever I could to show that I was fine, but to Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deok-Gu, I looked like a righteous person who didn't want to burden his comrades. If I really were infected with a deadly disease, then I would do whatever I could to go to the Everia Kingdom, and I would go there even if I had to make sacrifices. However, the issue was that I couldn't do that.

I had always been someone who thought about the worst-case scenario, and today wasn't an exception. I had to know what Kim Hyun-Sung had up his sleeve. No matter how much I thought about it, I would look suspicious if I didn't head to the Everia Kingdom, so it wasn't good to keep declining.

'Is there even a way?'

Kim Hyun-Sung's confident expression made me think that he really had something up his sleeve.

'Does he have the recipe to make an elixir?'

There was a high chance that he had something like that. I had no idea what he had

up his sleeve, but it had to be located in the Everia Kingdom. It was safe to assume that it was a Mythic item, whether it was a dungeon reward or a treasure of the elves. Since only an item at that level could heal my wounded soul, my assumption was probably right.

'Is it a dungeon or some kind of treasure that elves possess?'

Since every party member was going, it was highly likely that it was the former, but the latter was a possibility as well. In that case, he could end up in a situation where he had to use force.

Considering the fact that Kim Hyun-Sung had information from his past life, the former was even more likely to be true. He could have a dungeon's location in mind. After all, his strange remark had already hinted at what was to come to some extent, so it was very much possible.

The Forest of the World Tree in the Everia Kingdom had never been touched by foreigners, and because of the tight security, only a handful of people had managed to enter the place so far.

Even looking at High Elf Elena, it was clear that her body mechanism were completely different from mine. The place could have skills or items that were nonexistent in the human world, and there could be an item that would be beneficial to me among the items there. I wasn't sure if it was just a coincidence, but from Kim Hyun-Sung's point of view, it was the perfect time to visit the place. It could also be possible that the reason he decided to lead the Three Nation Alliance was that the visit to the Forest of the World Tree was included in his bigger picture.

'It makes sense.'

I was sure he had no idea that I had been afflicted with a deadly disease until now, but he knew about the aftereffects. When he realized that the situation had become a bit more serious, he definitely thought that he couldn't delay it any longer. His priorities ended up changing, and I wasn't happy about that because my soul wasn't actually wounded at all.

When I grabbed my head earlier, it was absurd how they looked at me as if I were about to die soon. To them, I had to have looked like someone living on borrowed time.

'That's not the case… '

At this point, it would be embarrassing to tell them that I lied.

"We'll leave tomorrow," Kim Hyun-Sung informed.

"What? That's too soon…" I commented.

"We don't have time to lose," he said.

'I need to delay it a little more.'

"It won't be an easy journey," he added.

'Then let's just rest at home, Hyun-Sung. Please… '

"It won't take long, so don't worry about Laios. You don't have to concern yourself with it for now. The Sacred Democratic Country has a lot more competent people than you think, Mr. Ki-Young. Personally, I'd recommend distancing yourself from work as much as possible, but if you'd like, I'll make arrangements so that we can keep an eye on the situation," he suggested.

'That's not necessary, man.'

"The bro is right. Miss Oscar, Miss Pristina, the people from the Vatican, and even the denizens of Laios are all working hard, saying that they can't let you be worried. They have the same thought as us…" Park Deok-Gu pointed out.

'I got it, so stop looking so touched.'

Park Deok-Gu had to be choking up because he stopped talking. I wasn't sure how he could be touched by his own words, but since he was an emotional person, I was sure he was thinking about something I couldn't comprehend. I wanted to get out of this situation somehow, but it seemed that I couldn't do anything about it.

"But we need permission from Everia," I told them.

"I'll handle that today. I'm sure they'll accept our request," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

Right now, I could only depend on Everia denying Kim Hyun-Sung's request, but they

were obviously not going to refuse him.

'Please deny it. I don't want to go. Damn it… I don't want to go… '

I had mixed feelings. I appreciated the fact that they had planned all this out for me, but my heart broke because their hard work would end up affecting me negatively. Fortunately, a good idea popped into my head. It could be a bit too much, but it was worth a try.

"I have one more question, Mr. Hyun-Sung."

"Yes?"

"This method that could supposedly heal my body… Is there any risk to it?" I asked.

Kim Hyun-Sung flinched. As a sincere person, it wouldn't be easy for him to lie.

In the end, he replied after sighing, "It could be dangerous, but…"

'That's what I'm talking about!'

"If you keep asking me to go to Everia, I won't refuse, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I started.

"Alright."

"I'd rather not let myself recover if it means endangering the others, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I continued.

"But…"

"…"

"…"

"I can't endanger the others just to save myself. It's also unreasonable to go on an expedition at a time like this. I'm sure you have your own work to handle, and the same goes for the others. The Blue Guild members…" I trailed off.

If the others would be in danger, it would be a different story. The idea I had come up with made me want to get up and dance.

“I can endure any danger that comes my way,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Just because you can do that doesn’t mean the others can do that as well. Innocent people can get killed in the process of trying to save one person. Of course, I understand how both of you are feeling, but focusing on the task at hand is the right thing to do. My problems should only come afterward. Going on an expedition like this without proper preparation is—”

“I-I can endure it! *Hiccup*.”

The door was flung open.

‘What the hell?’

It was Jung Ha-Yan. Tears and snot covered her face, and the way she looked at me was absurd that I wanted to ask if we were filming a drama or something. To make things worse, the other guild members started to appear behind her.

‘Shit. What’s going on?!’

In some ways, this could be a very touching scene, but knowing that the current situation was a lie, this was nothing more than a low-budget TV drama. My cheeks started to turn red. Sun Hee-Young looked as if she felt responsible for some reason. Ahn Ki-Mo turned up as well with his usual playful look, but Kim Ye-Ri looked determined. It was the same for Lee Chang-Ryeol and Yoo Ah-Young. Even though Lee Chang-Ryeol hadn’t spent a lot of time with us, he looked like he had decided to join the party. Jung Ha-Yan was still crying, and the Magic Scholar, Hwang Jung-Yeon, smiled warmly as if she was glad that all this had happened.

‘There’s really no need to show up in a group like this, you guys… ’

Moreover, they even started talking as if they had planned all this out, and their remarks made me shudder.

“I’m okay as well, Sub Guild Master. *Hahaha.* I have received a lot of help from you, and your assistance made it possible for me to join this guild. It’s my turn to help you now. Regardless of the danger, it’s only obvious that we stay with you,” Ahn Ki-Mo said.

“Me, too. I’ll be with you as well, Mister Ki-Young. I don’t like you, but… I don’t like

you dying either. And it won't be that dangerous. Because. Hyun-Sung oppa. Will be there. Yeah. And we're strong now," Kim Ye-Ri chimed in.[1]

"I agree with them. I will never, ever stand by and let you die, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. Even if I have to lay down my life. I'll do whatever I can to help you," Sun Hee-Young said.

"Same with me. You're the one who made the Blue Guild what it is today. Researching with you was one of my joys in life, so I can't lose that," Hwang Jung-Yeon commented.

I appreciated their thoughts, but I wanted to hide somewhere because I was blushing even more. Honestly, it was extremely embarrassing to be in the center of this TV drama.

"I'll do my best, Sub Guild Master."

"You're the one who made me who I am today, Sub Guild Master. I want to be of help to you this time."

Lee Chang-Ryeol and Yoo Ah-Young both looked determined as well. Jo Hye-Jin had an ambiguous expression, but the way she looked was actually more beneficial to my mental health. Han Sora obviously didn't want to join, but she realized that she was part of the party, so she observed the situation from the back.

"*Hiccup. Hiccup.*"

Jung Ha-Yan hugged me quietly while crying, and even though I didn't know why she was here, Princess Elena was here and was crying as well. While waiting for the end of this touching, low-budget TV drama, Park Deok-Gu and Kim Hyun-Sung got drunk in the atmosphere and quietly approached me to pat my shoulder.

"We won't let you die. Never," Park Deok-Gu said.

"It's been decided. Look. You're not alone, Mr. Ki-Young." Kim Hyun-Sung pointed out.

'I am by myself. What do you mean?'

I really wanted to leave this place if I could, but thanks to their serious faces, I had no choice but to nod and cry. This situation could be considered a perfect checkmate. I wanted to act stubborn a bit longer, but I couldn't say anything else in this situation. I

even told them how touched I was by what they had done without realizing it.

“Thank you very much… everyone.”

Politically and internally, I was in a critical situation. This was the moment when the expedition group composed of members who had fallen for my lie took their first step toward the elves’ home to heal my wounded soul. I had no idea when it would happen, but history could describe this decision like this: the warriors risked their lives and went on an expedition to rescue the hero of light.

‘I should stop lying from now on… ’

I was being half-sincere.

‘This will be the last.’

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1. Ye-Ri really talks like this in case someone points it out in the comments ☜

CHAPTER 345
THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF (4)

I thought about defending myself for the last time, but everything happened so fast that there was nothing I could have done. Kim Hyun-Sung was serious when he said that we would leave for the expedition the next day. Seeing the guild members prepare for the expedition right after the meeting was a really heartbreaking moment for me, but I wasn't crying because I was touched by their hard work. Honestly, I wanted them to suffer a bit for driving me into a corner.

I was hoping the elves wouldn't let us travel to Everia, but that wasn't the case. They actually welcomed us with open arms. I wasn't sure if they asked what our party really wanted, but I was sure this was the best news for the worried elves. Of course, Ludwig, or whatever his name was, didn't seem all that happy, but after Princess Elena strongly insisted on it, his weak opposition was crushed.

Naturally, the Three Nation Alliance proceeded smoothly. Along with the elves, Oscar and Pristina decided that they couldn't delay it for another day, so they quickly worked on the alliance. The leaders of each nation were doing their best to send us to Everia, so we naturally encountered not a single issue. The Sacred Democratic Country, Laios and Everia signed the complicated document faster than me trying to change my attitude, so everyone was satisfied. It was an alliance that benefited everyone.

[The Three Nation Alliance Formed. The first step toward a harmonious alliance between the nations.]

[On the 26th, the Sacred Democratic Country, Laios, and the Everia Kingdom formed an alliance. The leaders of each of the nations were satisfied with the alliance's quick and smooth establishment. In particular, the change in the isolationist Everia Kingdom has surprised many. The declaration of the Three Nation Alliance was read at the conference held in Laios, and the people cheered as they took a step forward toward a new utopia. Oscar, the leader of the Sacred Democratic Country, said, "It is a small step, but it's a big step toward improving relations with the other races," and the ambassador of Everia, Ludwig, spoke out about the importance of harmony

between the elves and the humans.]

[The Three Nation Alliance has condemned the Republic for protecting the demon summoner, Jin Cheong, and they have made an appeal for the extermination of black magic on the continent. While everyone has their eyes on the silent Republic's next move, the Three Nation Alliance plans to officially submit this case to the Continental Court on the 29th. - Reporter Kim Sung-Kyeong of the Lindel Daily.]

'Shit.'

It didn't even take a day for an article to be released after the document was signed. The content of the article was satisfactory, and I liked their plan to submit the recent incident to the Continental Court, but I was nervous about it. I wanted to ask why they delayed this alliance when it could have been established sooner. Perhaps it was because the Sacred Democratic Country and Laios had yielded in each and every article, but I couldn't understand the elves' quick acceptance as if they held no suspicions. I smiled bitterly at this strange situation where we had basically become *the world* because the alliance brought many different races together. In some ways, I profited as well because I had basically created the Three Nation Alliance.

"It's time to go, Mr. Ki-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

I wanted to take a little more time, but Kim Hyun-Sung didn't give me that luxury. I resented him because he suddenly entered my room and extended his hand toward me.

"Let's go together," he said.

"How are the preparations going?" I asked.

"The preparation is perfect, and the guild members' condition seems to be better than usual. With Mr. Deok-Gu at the center, they seem very passionate. Mr. Deok-Gu has always been a passionate person, but he has become more passionate than usual," he replied.

'Park Deok-Gu, you're the worst… '

"You don't have to worry so much. Nothing will happen," he added.

"Yeah…"

Even though I could walk properly, it was ridiculous how he supported me with one arm. Kim Hyun-Sung had to have thought that I had no energy because I was sick, so he was trying to help me, and I started to feel ashamed about it.

'I'm not sick. I lied about everything.'

Even if I told him the truth right now, I would still surely be the boy who cried wolf because the only thought in our lovely regressor's mind was my treatment.

We continued walking, and I noticed people glancing at us. It was still early in the morning, but the news still spread like wildfire. It was the news about the Blue Guild's expedition to treat Lee Ki-Young, the hero of light. I didn't know where the news had come from, but for some reason, I had a feeling that Park Deok-Gu was behind it.

When we walked further, I saw the guild members, Elena, and the key figures of each nation waiting for me in front of the castle gate. Kasugano Yuno was chatting with Cha Hee-Ra and Lee Ji-Hye, while Oscar and Pristina were looking at us from afar. The important figures from the Vatican were also there. It seemed like they had been waiting for me since dawn. It seemed that greeting each and every one of them wasn't going to be an easy task.

Cha Hee-Ra, who seemed lethargic these days, approached me and patted my back while Kasugano Yuno bowed toward me. Oscar spoke words of blessing, but I didn't really catch what she said. The high priests of the Sacred Democratic Country and the others said something similar to what Oscar had said. I tried my best not to lose my business smile, but the bitterness within me caused me to smile bitterly as well. Actually, I thought my bitter smile was perfect for the situation.

I suddenly heard someone crying. Lee Ji-Hye looked like she was trying to suppress her smile, so it was ridiculous how she was acting like she was crying.

'This girl… '

I was sure that if Elena saw Lee Ji-Hye, she would spit out blood rather than just vomit. Not suggesting their meeting was one of my greatest regrets. I honestly wanted to take someone who would be more helpful to me, but considering the situation, only the Blue Guild members could leave for the expedition.

Kim Hyun-Sung didn't want the others to participate, and I honestly agreed with him.

After all, we needed someone to take care of the business here while we were on our expedition.

Anyway, the overall atmosphere felt like a grief-stricken home, but the expedition members looked hopeful for some reason. The person in charge of this expedition—Kim Hyun-Sung—kept on encouraging the expedition members, and the expedition party soon opened the castle gates to leave for the expedition.

'Please don't do this. What kind of TV drama is it this time?'

I saw a ridiculous scene.

'Don't do this. Don't attack my conscience, you bastards.'

My conscience was actually fine because I had seen the denizens of Laios before, but this time, they weren't cheering. Instead, the atmosphere was extremely solemn. Usually, I would be happy about seeing this kind of scene, but for some reason, I didn't feel happy at all. I cheered when I saw how they acted when I was lying in bed, but the current situation compared to back then was completely different. The way they waved their hands and cheered for me made them look like evil spirits of hell that were shouting about how it was time for me to get punished.

"I think more people have gathered compared to last time. Amazing…" Park Deok-Gu commented.

"You're right."

"As expected from hyung-nim," he said.

Park Deok-Gu next to me started mumbling, and Jung Ha-Yan nodded in agreement. Kim Hyun-Sung was walking next to me as well. I kept hearing voices everywhere. At first, the voices weren't that loud, but as time went on, the voice started getting louder.

"H-Hang in there!"

"You can do it! I'll pray for you!"

"Thank you, and please come back to Laios after you've fully recovered! I'll pray for you every day, Father Lee Ki-Young!"

“Laios will not forget all of you. Please visit us again!”

“Don’t lose hope! We didn’t lose hope, and it’s all thanks to you, Father Lee Ki-Young!”

“You can overcome it! I’m sure you’ll recover!”

It was a sight to behold. Aside from the path the expedition party was walking on, there were people everywhere. Some yelled from their windows, while others even climbed up roofs. The one thing they all had in common was that they were crying. There were so many people that the guards of Laios were having a hard time controlling the crowd. All of a sudden, a child ran out from the crowd. The guards quickly tried to stop the child, but my cursed brain told me that I had to maintain a certain image, so I hurriedly made a move as well. I quietly stopped the guards, and the child approached me before handing over a letter and sweets.

[Thank you, warrior of light. Thank you for saving my parents and myself. I heard that you’re really sick. I want to see you again once you’re healthy. I’ll pray for you every day.]

The handwriting was crooked, and even though the size of the letters varied, the child obviously did their best to write it as neatly as they could.

‘This is pretty effective.’

It wasn’t enough to break my conscience down, but the child spoke to me while tightening their cute fists.

“Hang in there! You can do it!”

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“Leah. It’s Leah. You have to recover, sir!” Leah cheered.

“Thanks.”

I nodded and patted her head.

I felt bitter again, but Kim Hyun-Sung had to have thought that a lot was going through my head. I glanced to the side and saw him smiling at me.

“I wanted to show this sight to you,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

‘So you did all of this… ’

“Everyone wants you to be healthy as soon as possible. Look at them. There are a lot of people cheering you on, Mr. Ki-Young,” he added.

‘I see it as well, Hyun-Sung.’

“I’ll do my best as well. I hope you don’t lose hope either,” he continued.

‘I have never lost hope… ’

“Don’t worry, everyone! We’ll make sure hyung-nim returns to normal! We’ll save him no matter what!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

“You can do it, Mr. Lee Ki-Young!”

Park Deok-Gu yelled, and the people started cheering again. I had no idea why he started crying, but he kept making the atmosphere even more intense. As the cheers got louder, an unknown sense of duty started to fill the eyes of the guild members.

‘Damn it.’

“Thank you, everyone.”

“No problem, Sub Guild Master.”

A group with a goal was powerful. The guild members’ resolve grew as the cheers got louder, and the anxiety inside of me grew even stronger along with the cheers I could hear from afar.

CHAPTER 346
THE CITY OF ELVES (1)

“How are you feeling, Father Lee Ki-Young?” Elena asked.

“I feel comfortable to the point that I can’t even remember the last time I felt this comfortable. I feel great,” I replied.

Of course, it was a sarcastic reply, but it seemed like Elena didn’t notice the thorns in my words because she smiled brightly. She was also definitely thinking that she was having a productive day by using an unfamiliar holy spell on me. However, the way she was using it on me made her look like she was treating a leper. The disgusting energy was definitely still there because she seemed like she was enduring it by slowly opening and closing her mouth. It had been a while since we were together in this enclosed space, so it was amazing that she was able to endure it for this long. I didn’t know what part of my soul was disgusting, but when I recalled how she vomited as soon as we shook hands, I couldn’t help but think that she was brave for enduring it this long.

“W-Would it be fine if I got some fresh air? *Ugh*,” Elena asked.

“Of course,” I replied.

The noises she made after leaving the carriage with a smile were absurd.

“*Eurk, euuurk.*”

‘I can hear everything… ’

“*Bleeeeeeeeeck.*”

‘I can hear it all… ’

“*Eurk… Bleeeeck.*”

“Lady Elena… Lady Elena…” Ludwig called out.

"*Ha… ha…* Yes?" she answered.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

"I'm fine, Ludwig," she replied.

"You don't have to overdo it," he told her.

"It's fine, Ludwig. I'm sure Father Lee Ki-Young is suffering more than me. This mission was given to me, so I have to do my best. I can't say that I'm exhausted when I haven't done much yet. *Haha*…" she explained with a hollow chuckle.

"But… Lady Elena, he's…"

Ludwig had definitely realized that there wasn't any soundproof magic because I couldn't hear his voice anymore. However, what he had done was no different from shutting the stable's door after stealing the horses.

'He's a nightingale, all right.'

I couldn't hear him, but I could somehow deduce what they were talking about. Ludwig and the other elves were probably telling her that she had to rest and Elena, who had a strange sense of duty toward me, kept on nodding while telling them that she was fine.

To be honest, the treatment that she had been doing was nothing but pouring her holy power into me, but to her attendants, it looked as if their princess were stepping into a plague-infested area. Naturally, they couldn't just stand by and watch their princess vomit several times a day. Even I couldn't help but think that it was a bit too much, but I was sure Elena thought that I had it worse than her.

I glanced beyond the window, and the scenery kept changing. It felt like I was on a train. Various buffs were cast on the horse pulling the wagon, so it would naturally move fast. In addition, I couldn't feel the carriage's movements. I couldn't imagine how hard the mages and priests of the guild were working to maintain the wagon's suspension. I was sure that marching would never be more comfortable than this.

'They really didn't have to do all this.'

Even if I told them that I was fine, it would be like talking to a wall. I told them many

times that I was feeling better, but they didn't listen to me. It had gotten to the point that I had to force myself to maintain my life. It would be even more strange if I suddenly acted like I was fine, so I was maintaining my previous condition for now. To show everyone that Elena's treatment was effective, I slightly lengthened the interval between seizures, but because of what the elf princess had said, the other guild members didn't seem relieved. I was slowly extending the interval between seizures by having seizures every eight to eleven hours after the previous one. Right now, I need to have a seizure. I really didn't want to do it because it was painful, but I had no other choice but to take deep breaths and start groaning.

The point was to hide my pain from the expedition members. Light Ki-Young didn't want his teammates to know that he was in pain, so I held my miserable screams back and twisted my body like I had done when there were other people watching me back then in the meeting room. My movement was good enough that I could appear in a major zombie movie, and I could surely give myself the best performance award.

"*Ah… Ack…*"

In the end, I couldn't hold my scream back, and it started leaking out the door. Elena definitely heard my voice because she appeared when the door was flung open.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young! Mr. Lee Ki-Young!" Elena called out.

"*Aaaaaack!*"

"Ludwig! Please hold onto his arms for me," she ordered.

"Okay."

"I think his soul is weakening again. Please hold on, Father Lee Ki-Young. I'm here with you. I'm right here," she said.

"*Uggggh*."

Naturally, I bit my lips and started crying. Princess Elena poured her holy power into me while crying as well.

"You can overcome this, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. You must fight it," she urged.

"*Kghhhhhh…*"

"Please don't give up. Don't give in. Resist it," she added.

"What's going on? Is hyung-nim…" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"O-Oppa!" Jung Ha-Yan called out.

The spectators who wanted to watch my acting barged into my room worriedly. Pure holy power should make anyone feel better, so I should have started to feel better as if I were drinking a tonic as soon as Elena's holy power entered my body. But for some reason, this woman's holy power brought me pain. I wasn't hallucinating back then, and this wasn't the first time I received treatment from her, but for some reason, her holy power still brought me pain. The pain wasn't unbearable, and when Elena started to run out of breath after using her holy power to the limits, I started acting like I was calming down.

"*Heuuuuuung…*"

"Are you okay, hyung-nim?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

I was exhausted, and I felt as if I would fall asleep anytime soon. Elena was covered in sweat, but Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan had tears and snot on their faces. I thought about how I had gotten a stack of scum today, but what I had done was the best thing I could have done with my current situation. I had no choice but to maintain this lie. I closed my eyes and was about to fall asleep, but a voice spoke ridiculous words. Unfortunately, it wasn't good news for me.

"Is he feeling better? Is he sleeping right now?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Yes, he's okay now, but it looks like he passed out," Elena replied.

"I want you to be honest. He seems kind of calm now, but the duration of his seizure has become longer… Did the first aid treatment not work on him?" he asked.

"It worked, and I wish I had good news, but that isn't the case. The interval between his seizures has become longer, which can be considered good news, but… his condition hasn't improved at all. His soul is still tainted, and it has become twisted to the point that I can't even take a proper look at it. It feels as if the energy's resistance has become fiercer than before. I never expected that it would be this rotten… I think

it might be difficult for me to improve his condition with my powers alone," Elena replied.

"Then…"

"Yes, his soul is still crumbling down, and he's still in danger," she said.

"W-What do we need to do?" he asked.

"I don't know how to tell you this, but… I'll do whatever I can," she replied.

"Hey, thanks a lot, really. I'm not sure how to thank you for this…" Park Deok-Gu said.

"As I've told you before, there's no need to thank me because this mission was given to me," she reminded him.

"*Ah!* I-I have one more question…" Park Deok-Gu started.

"Please ask," Elena responded.

"H-How long does he have… do we still have time?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. It could be tomorrow or a year later. Right now, the only thing we can do is hope that Mr. Lee Ki-Young perseveres. Everything depends on his will," she answered.

"I-In that case, there shouldn't be a problem. I don't know about anything else, but hyung-nim has one mighty spirit. It doesn't matter whether his soul is crumbling down or if it has been tainted because I'm sure he'll overcome it all. If he's left alone, he'll live for at least ten more years. I'm sure of it… I-I can finally relax… Yes, indeed…" he stuttered.

"I'm certain he'll overcome it," Elena remarked.

Based on his voice, Park Deok-Gu sounded like he was crying, and Jung Ha-Yan kept on massaging my hand while sobbing. This wasn't my first time hearing that kind of conversation, but I still felt uncomfortable.

'What do you mean I don't have long to live?'

I wanted to get up right now and dance, but I couldn't open my eyes because of the heavy atmosphere. Actually, this happened several times a day so I had gotten kind of used to it. This kind of event had long become part of my daily routine. The members of the Blue Guild continued to cry inside the moving carriage.

"I think it has been a while since he slept as deeply as this…" Park Deok-Gu commented.

"We should probably leave. We'll be arriving soon, so we should let him rest for a bit. You too, Miss Jung Ha-Yan," Elena suggested.

"I-I-I'm going to stay here…" Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"…"

"I-I'm staying here," she repeated.

"Miss Jung Ha-Yan, I understand how you're feeling…" Elena started.

"I'm staying here. *Hiccup*. I'm staying here," Jung Ha-Yan said once more.

"Hey, just let noonim stay with him a bit," Park Deok-Gu suggested.

"But…"

"I'm sure hyung-nim would want that as well, and we're going to arrive in a few hours anyway. Let's just leave them alone," he said.

"Alright," Elena finally agreed.

I didn't know what Park Deok-Gu meant when he said that I *would want that as well*, but I soon heard the door close. Naturally, my body started to feel tense because based on my past experiences, Jung Ha-Yan would always do something strange whenever I was sleeping. This time, it was fortunate that she didn't do anything other than lie down next to me. Actually, she was still crying.

"*Hiccup*… *Heuuuung*…"

'Ah, seriously.'

"*Hiccup… hiccup…*"

'Stop crying… '

At this point, a part of my conscience felt bothered. I felt extremely bothered because all I could hear was the sound of her cries in this quiet room. Since I was exhausted, I wanted to sleep more, but I couldn't sleep in this atmosphere.

"*Hiccup*… Don't be sick. *Hiccup*," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"…"

"*Hiccup…*"

"…"

'When are we arriving? I thought we were almost there?'

It felt like the passage of time had slowed down, but Jung Ha-Yan seemed like she wasn't going to stop crying anytime soon, and after spending three hours with my eyes closed, I could finally hear people busily moving outside.

'Nice.'

I had no idea what was going on, but I could feel how the carriage was slowing down. We were approaching the Everia Kingdom and even Jung Ha-Yan, who had been crying all this while, quietly got up. I didn't know what she was doing, but I was certain that she was looking out the window. At some point, the carriage stopped, and I could hear the door open.

"Hey, noonim. I think we're here, so why don't you…"

"What about oppa?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"We should let him rest a bit more…" Park Deok-Gu suggested.

"It's fine, Deok-Gu. I'm up," I chimed in.

"*Kgh*… You can sleep a bit more if you want…" he muttered.

“We’re here, so we might as well look around the Everia Kingdom…” I pointed out.

As soon as I got up, Jung Ha-Yan grabbed my arm, and Park Deok-Gu treated me as if he were treating a baby. In the end, I managed to get out of the carriage, but the unbalanced scenery was actually making me feel uncomfortable.

“Welcome to the Everia Kingdom, everyone,” Elena said.

“Welcome…”

Kim Hyun-Sung was at the front, and he was talking to someone while shaking their hand. Jo Hye-Jin and the others were doing the same. However, the surroundings caught my attention the most. I couldn’t take my eyes off the overwhelming scenery before me.

“Wow…”

I was so mesmerized that I stared in wonder without realizing it.

CHAPTER 347
THE CITY OF ELVES (2)

The elves were the most isolationist among the hidden races with the same policy. In addition, they didn't really have a good relationship with humans. After destroying the black market in Castle Rock, it had become difficult to find elf slaves in the Sacred Democratic Country, but elves were still being traded discreetly. As such, the elves chose to become even more hidden, and as a result, the forest of the elves became a mysterious land. I was honestly surprised when I first saw Laios, but the Everia Kingdom overwhelmed me more than I could have ever imagined.

'Seriously… '

I was in awe of its nature. The lush green forest, beautiful, colorful flowers, and trees of different sizes made it difficult for me to see their summits, and the air I breathed in was also different. It was ridiculous for me to say this, but I felt like I was getting purified even though I actually wasn't being purified. The best part was the tall tree located in the middle of the forest. The tree with an indescribable size was strangely suitable for the surroundings, creating a picturesque scene.

'The World Tree?'

It was the World Tree I had only heard about in stories until now. I had never heard of a tree emitting a faint glow, so I was certain that it was the World Tree. While we were in awe, Elena's ears were pointed upward, revealing her good mood. It was understandable since she had arrived at a place filled with fresh air after staying in a place that resembled more of a dumpster. I was busy looking around, but I turned my head after hearing a voice and saw a familiar face.

'They look alike.'

A man with emerald hair and eyes like Elena. I could deduce that he was related to her somehow.

After greeting the leader of the party, Kim Hyun-Sung, he headed my way. He was apparently 300 years old. The age difference wasn't too far apart for Elena to call him

father, so they were probably siblings. What stood out about him the most was that he was just as strong as the members of the Eight Seats and the Five Tiger Generals. I was sure there were stronger elves, but I was really happy to see a powerful elf who seemed like he was the face of the elves.

“Welcome to the Everia Kingdom, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

“You are?” I asked.

“I’m Elias Everia, but feel free to call me Elias,” he answered.

“It’s an honor to meet you, Mr. Elias,” I greeted.

“Please, no need to speak so formally. It is my honor to meet you. By the way, I heard your condition is really bad…” he mentioned.

“I’m embarrassed, but it’s true,” I replied.

“I’m… sorry to hear that…” he muttered.

“It’s nothing for you to be worried about,” I told him.

“I’ve seen you fight through the goddess’ mirror as well. I’d like to thank you on behalf of the elves,” he said.

“I just did what was right,” I commented.

Our conversation was a little too formal, and as expected, I noticed that some welcomed us while others were wary of us.

“Let’s head inside. I’ll guide you to your rooms,” he suggested.

“Okay.”

Armed elves started to surround us. On the outside, they were there to protect us, but I also thought that it was to protect the elves from us. The interesting part was that the other elves were looking at us as if we were monkeys in a zoo. The children gathered and watched us, but the elves looking at us from unique-shaped buildings stood out as well. Some were murmuring while others were cheering, but the overall reaction was…

'About half are welcoming us.'

They weren't rejecting us, but they were wary of us. Still, the meaning was the same.

As we walked slowly, Elias started talking…

"It has been 556 years since humans entered this place."

"…"

"It's not exactly a long time, but I'm sure the children find this really interesting, so don't feel offended by it. Of course, there are some who'll be hostile toward you, but—"

"I understand," I interrupted him.

"I'm relieved to hear that. When I heard that you were going to visit us, I was kind of worried, but… I'm actually relieved. Everyone possesses some level of hatred toward humans. Of course, it's not hatred towards the heroes of light, but our race still remembers the pain we had experienced at the hands of humans. If we go outside near the palace, you can still see hunters that hunt other races, and when thinking about how people still trade slaves of other races somewhere, the hatred makes sense," he explained.

"…"

"We know that the Sacred Democratic Country is one of the nations implementing the Anti-Slavery Law, but that wouldn't matter to the majority of the elves. It's heartbreaking for me as well, but to some of the elves, humans are… just greedy and dangerous beings," he added.

"These people are different from others, Elias. You saw them through the goddess' mirror…" Elena chimed in.

"I already know that, Elena. I'm not trying to blame our guests right now. I'm just explaining the truth," he told her.

'That doesn't really seem like the case… '

Elias wasn't exactly hostile toward us, but the conversation just now implied many

things. Basically, he wanted us to stay quiet. The Three Nation Alliance was successfully established, but the way we felt about each other was different.

'This is interesting, and I can smell something fishy as well… '

It was a simple assumption, but it was a reasonable one. Even though they had signed the document, seeing how big their reactions were when only a few humans entered their territory, I could tell what it was like here. They could have offered to join as a way to simply face a bigger threat, but it was very likely that they were experiencing external and internal issues. They may have joined the alliance because they needed our help.

'I wonder what it is… '

Of course, I couldn't really tell what was going on right now because this place looked peaceful, and it wasn't like they didn't possess any military power. Overall, the soldiers looked pretty strong, and I saw many talented archers among them as well. There were also more Spiritual Sorcerers compared to mages, which was rare amongst humans. To put it bluntly, they were a strong nation. Moreover, the barrier protecting the city was of excellent quality, so I wondered why they requested to join the Three Nation Alliance.

'I'm sure there's a reason behind it.'

I didn't have enough knowledge about this place to make assumptions, and when I was about to continue my thoughts, I heard a voice again. It seemed that we had arrived at our rooms.

"You can stay here while you're in our kingdom. Please rest up for today, and I'll make plans for you to meet His Majesty the King. *Ah*, feel free to use the remaining time to look around the city, but please refrain from going inside restricted areas," Elias warned.

"Okay."

"I'll guide them around the city, Elias," Elena offered.

"No, you need to see Father, Elena. It'll be better if Ludwig guides our guests," he informed her.

“But—”

“Father is waiting. Please enjoy your stay.” Elias directly changed the subject.

“Wait, Mr. Elias.”

Kim Hyun-Sung suddenly called out.

‘What’s wrong with him?’

“If possible, I’d like to meet His Majesty right now,” he requested.

“Excuse me?” Elias asked.

“I know it’s rude, but it’s an urgent matter. If you could make time—” he muttered.

“It’s late right now…”

“Please,” Kim Hyun-Sung requested.

‘What’s wrong, man?’

It was a surprise to see him repeatedly ask until Elias approved of it. I didn’t know what was happening, but Elias seemed surprised by Kim Hyun-Sung’s serious expression, and Elena looked the same. However, it was undeniably related to me. It was a stretch to call it rude, but I was sure Elias couldn’t deny that the atmosphere changed a bit. Elias started talking, and his voice definitely sounded different from before. In fact, he even looked wary.

“Could I hear the reason first?”

“His Majesty will understand if he hears it directly from me, Mr. Elias,” Kim Hyun-Sung replied.

“…”

“It won’t harm Everia,” he added.

“…”

"…"

There was a long silence. Both Kim Hyun-Sung and Elias were looking at each other quietly, and that was when the tall elf released a sigh.

"If that's the case, I'll submit a request. Please follow me, Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung. Elena, you should return to your room for now…" Elias told her.

"No, I'll stay with them," Elena refused.

"Elena."

"I'm sure you're aware of the situation, Elias. My decision remains the same," she added.

"*Whoo*…"

He was probably having a headache…

I sympathized with him because I knew exactly what he was feeling. In the end, he still couldn't beat his little sister.

Elias eventually left the room after saying goodbye to us. Kim Hyun-Sung followed behind Elias, and he had an amusing expression. Kim Hyun-Sung seemed like someone preparing for a very important job interview with that resolute look of his.

'What's going on?'

I was nervous because I had no information. I knew something was going on, but I never imagined Kim Hyun-Sung would start working this quickly and not only that, he even asked for a private audience with His Majesty. I was worried that he was going to just ask His Majesty to hand over the kingdom's treasure, but Kim Hyun-Sung probably wouldn't go that far regardless of the situation's urgency.

'I'm getting nervous… Letting him go there by himself is making me nervous… '

I wanted to go with him, but someone else was already holding me back. If possible, I hope that they wouldn't a way to cure my body. It would be perfect if the situation ended before it became more serious.

Meanwhile, Elena was guiding the other members while keeping an eye on my condition, and even though the other guild members were talking about various topics, I wasn't really listening because I was worried that the uncomfortable situation would become even more uncomfortable. As always, my gut feeling wasn't wrong.

It had been an hour since Kim Hyun-Sung left, and I started hearing people moving busily outside. It sounded like they were headed toward us, so when I looked over at Elena, who was sitting next to me, she nodded and looked out the door.

"What's going on?" Elena asked.

"Please excuse us, Lady Elena."

"What do you think you're doing?!" she yelled.

"Please forgive our rudeness."

"Lay down your weapons this instant!" she ordered.

I heard loud noises outside, and even though I didn't know what was going on, I became sure of one thing…

'What did that bastard Kim Hyun-Sung say?'

…Our lovely regressor went too far.

CHAPTER 348
THE CITY OF ELVES (3)

I focused my mana on my ears and heard loud noises in the next room as well. Armed knights charged into the room.

'Shit… What did Kim Hyun-Sung say?'

I immediately placed my hand inside my pocket, and I had to quickly decide whether to throw the Dragon Breath potion or not. Princess Elena had to be really shocked because she kept yelling, but she wasn't helping much.

"I made it clear for you to put down your weapons!" Elena yelled.

"It's Sir Elias' order. We're not trying to cause harm. It's to protect the visitors for a moment," a knight informed.

"Is this your way of protecting them? Even if it's my brother's order, I won't stand by and watch," she told them.

"I apologize, Lady Elena. You need to follow us as well," the knight said.

"What?" Elena asked.

"I apologize."

I had no idea what was going on, but one thing I was sure of was that this was the first time this happened Those elves didn't seem hostile toward us, but I was uncomfortable by the fact that we were basically being detained.

'I think he totally messed up.'

Naturally, I thought seriously about whether I needed to escape from here or not, but the wall next to me was suddenly destroyed. As the wall crumbled down, the person I saw with a large shield was…

“Sub Guild Master!”

Yoo Ah-Young and Lee Chang-Ryeol[1], who was wearing a mask.

“Come over to this side. Quickly!” Yoo Ah-Young said.

I stood up and quickly walked up to them, and Yoo Ah-Young grabbed me. I felt like I was in a popular American drama, but I couldn’t think about anything else due to the chaotic situation.

I quickly grabbed Elena’s hand, and she moved to this side as well.

“*Kyah!*”

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“I-I don’t know either. It’s all so sudden…” Elena replied.

“A trap? Could it be a trap, Sub Guild Master?” Yoo Ah-Young asked.

“I’m not sure. Do you know where the others are, Miss Ah-Young?” I asked.

“I know where they are, Sub Guild Master,” Lee Chang-Ryeol answered.

Unlike his name, he was skilled.[2]

Anyway, we needed to create a path, so I hurriedly said, “Please try not to kill.”

“Alright.”

No explanation was necessary, and the answer I received was succinct. Yoo Ah-Young immediately equipped the helmet on the bed and started running. Lee Chang-Ryeol was also blocking the elves trying to enter through the walls Yoo Ah-Young had created. The interesting part was that these two were more skilled than I thought. I thought about using Mind’s Eye on them when I get the chance, but now wasn’t the time to do that.

I snapped my finger while casting a spell, and a large dragon tail popped up from the ground and filled the wall Lee Chang-Ryeol was blocking. I didn’t give them any orders, but Lee Chang-Ryeol and Yoo Ah-Young stuck to the door and started

breaking through the soldiers who were pouring in.

“This way, Sub Guild Master!” Yoo Ah-Young yelled.

“I’m going to look for Ha-Yan first,” I told her.

Before I could finish talking, I felt a large flow of mana. Jung Ha-Yan was the only person who could control such a large amount of mana.

‘What kind of trouble is she going to cause this time?’

Obviously, I started screaming. “Don’t kill them!”

I screamed, but I wasn’t sure if she heard me. I waited nervously for the spell to fall, and she had to have heard me because the mana disappeared. I had no idea what was going on right now, but I managed to stop a large amount of mana from falling on the place. Unfortunately, I wasn’t sure if what happened afterward was any better.

“*Ah!*”

I saw a few elves being thrown outside. She definitely used her mana to push the soldiers back, and I was sure the explosion came from Jung Ha-Yan’s room.

“Let’s head to the source of that noise,” I ordered.

“Okay…”

Yoo Ah-Young slapped her helmet once more, and along with a *click* sound, a face mask came down from the top of her helmet. I was worried that she wouldn’t be able to see, but I didn’t need to worry at all because she started moving immediately, and the way she moved was pretty impressive. The way she swung her hammer while wearing heavy armor made her look like a main tank rather than a blacksmith. Park Deok-Gu and Kim Hyun-Sung definitely influenced her a lot because I could see traces of their movement techniques in how Yoo Ah-Young was moving. Since Yoo Ah-Young had outstanding talent from the start, the fact that she grew this much wasn’t strange at all.

Lee Chang-Ryeol was the same. Despite the small space, he was jumping here and there and helping Yoo Ah-Young out.

'Are we doing the right thing, though?'

The one thing that bothered me was that the elves didn't seem like they were trying to kill us. However, the fact that they sent armed soldiers made the situation clear. I didn't know whether they were sent to actually isolate us or to protect us, but…

'It's probably best to find the others first.'

Hearing about the situation after gathering everyone was the right thing to do.

I snapped my fingers again, and a dragon's head popped up. In addition, the dragon's head started gathering mana, eliciting screams from everyone.

"I-It's Breath!"

"Get away!"

It was obviously just a bluff because there was no way this dragon head would shoot out something like that. When the soldiers took cover, Yoo Ah-Young quickly moved while leading me away. The soldiers were flustered once they realized that it had all just been a feint, but we had already left the area.

"There will be four as soon as we turn the corner," Lee Chang-Ryeol informed.

"Prepare yourself, Miss Ah-Young," I ordered.

"Okay, Sub Guild Master," Yoo Ah-Young said.

I prepared for the unexpected by pouring mana into the potion in my pocket while moving as if I was sliding. Yoo Ah-Young tried to swing her hammer sideways, but she stopped upon seeing a familiar face. Actually, her hammer was blocked by a large shield.

"You scared me. Hyung-nim! You're here as well, Ah-Young!"

"Mr. Ki-Young!"

"Sub Guild Master!"

It was Park Deok-Gu, Han Sora, Hwang Jung-Yeon, and Sun Hee-Young. Han Sora

looked anxious, while Park Deok-Gu and Hwang Jung-Yeon looked the same as always.

“Are you okay, hyung-nim? What the hell is going on?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“We’re going to find Ha-Yan first,” I informed them.

“I’m sure noonim is fine since she’s with Miss Hye-Jin,” he said.

“Have you confirmed Mr. Ahn Ki-Mo and Ye-Ri’s location?” I asked.

“They’re probably—”

Boom!

A loud explosion reverberated above us. When I looked out the window, I saw Ahn Ki-Mo and Kim Ye-Ri jumping outside.

“Let’s go,” I said.

“Is noonim okay?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“You said she was with Miss Hye-Jin, right? I’m sure they’ll come down soon,” I replied.

“O-Okay. Hold on tight,” he said.

Miss Jung-Yeon and Miss Sora, please prepare a floating spell,” I ordered.

“Okay, Sub Guild Master.”

Before I could give the signal, Park Deok-Gu and Yoo Ah-Young struck the wall hard with their shields and the wall instantly broke down. When I was about to say something, Park Deok-Gu grabbed my waist and jumped. Princess Elena’s eyes widened as if she was asking what was going on, and she screamed when we jumped, but I was more curious than her.

I looked for Kim Ye-Ri while looking down, but I couldn’t see where she went. I turned my head while falling and saw Kim Ye-Ri hanging from one of the walls. A wire was tied around her waist, but Ahn Ki-Mo was screaming while hanging from

the end of the wire. After seeing us, Kim Ye-Ri instantly cut off the wire Ahn Ki-Mo was hanging from and jumped. I wasn't sure how she was able to move while in the air, but the girl, who was sad about not gaining volume in certain parts of her body, grabbed Park Deok-Gu's shoulder and joined the party. The falling Ahn Ki-Mo was supported by a floating spell that appeared beneath his feet.

Elena, Kim Ye-Ri, Yoo Ah-Young, Han Sora, and I were hanging onto Park Deok-Gu, and upon landing, Sun Hee-Young immediately spoke.

"Please gather."

"Okay."

She said two words, and light started shining down on the group. Buff-type holy magic poured down, and I started to feel more energetic. The explanation was long, but the process that happened instantly caused Elena's jaw to drop.

"A-Amazing…" Elena commented.

I agreed. Our Hyun-Sung had to have been working hard while I was resting because the party members had grown to the point that I was amazed. I saw some whose stats still hadn't completely grown, but they perfectly made up for each other's weaknesses.

However, my surprise didn't last long. When I turned my head to make our next move, I heard Elias's voice and saw him heading toward us.

'Ah… '

"It wasn't my intention to attack you. Please lower your weapons," Elias said.

"Elias! What's going on?!" Elena yelled.

"Quiet, Elena. I promise. I wasn't trying to cause any trouble and was trying to keep you safe until the conversation was over…" he said.

"Isn't that the same thing? You need to tell us why you did this," Park Deok-Gu pointed out.

"I can't tell you here. First, if you could lower…"

‘Shit.’

“…”

‘What should I do?’

I was thinking about whether I should believe him or not. Even Elena seemed like she didn’t know what was going on. Generally speaking, I thought there was a misunderstanding because of Kim Hyun-Sung, but I couldn’t exclude the possibility that the elves had a connection with the Republic.

“I’d like to hear what’s going on first,” I requested.

“I can’t tell you here, so please follow the protocol. Causing more trouble won’t help either nation,” he suggested.

“You need to realize that you guys are the ones causing trouble.” I pointed out.

“It was never my intention to threaten you. I’m really sorry for startling you,” he apologized.

‘I don’t think he’s lying… ’

Still, I couldn’t lay down the weapon in my hand. Choosing to talk it out when I had the upper hand was the right choice. However, the guild was currently being cornered, so if I laid my weapon down, we could get backstabbed. Elias was even blocking the exit. I thought about escaping by using Elena as a hostage, but I wasn’t in the mood for that.

‘I need to do something about that bastard first.’

Elias was at least within the top eight of the strongest people I had met so far. Even if I were to run away from here, we still had to do something about him.

I looked around slowly and noticed that our forces weren't bad. Park Deok-Gu and Yoo Ah-Young could take care of the front while Ahn Ki-Mo and Sun Hee-Young could continuously take care of them from the backline. If Jung Ha-Yan or Jo Hye-Jin joined us, we could easily break through Elias and his soldiers’ blockade.

‘He’s the problem.’

I tapped my head with my finger…

'Where did Lee Chang-Ryeol go?'

I thought that he could have run away by himself, but he wasn't that useless. I didn't know what Lee Chang-Ryeol was thinking, but I had a feeling about it.

'Should we try?'

It wouldn't hurt to try. If we were going to try, it would be more beautiful if we start it when they least expected it. Turning thoughts into action was a fast process. When I immediately started casting a spell, the party members caught onto my movement and reacted. The surprised Elias unsheathed his sword, but Lee Chang-Ryeol instantly appeared beside him with his dagger.

'Lee Chang-Ryeol, you coward! Nice one!'

Elias turned around and grabbed both of Lee Chang-Ryeol's hands, but with a *fwoosh*, a hidden weapon flew toward the former. I thought I would finally get to witness the miracle of the red mask he always wore, but Elias turned his head and dodged. Meanwhile, Kim Ye-Ri threw her dagger toward Elias' hand holding Lee Chang-Ryeol hostage, while Park Deok-Gu and Yoo Ah-Young immediately moved forward while holding their shields up. The surprise attack had failed, but we would still manage to buy some time with this.

'We can break through.'

My only miscalculation was that Lee Chang-Ryeol didn't manage to escape Elias' grasp.

Boom!

Elias pressed Lee Chang-Ryeol down, even though he was already lying on the ground.

"I'm being serious. Put down your weapons. It wasn't my intention to hurt you."

---

1. Pending clarification as the character was originally introduced as Lee Chang-

Ryeol but is written as Kim ☜

2. Chang-Ryeol in Korean is used to describe an item that's poor in quality compared to the price so at first that's what Lee Ki-Young thought of Lee Chang-Ryeol but in this chapter, he was the opposite. ☜

CHAPTER 349
THE CITY OF ELVES (4)

'Shit… '

"I'll say it one more time. I didn't have any other intentions," Elias said.

"How can I believe you?" I asked.

"…"

"…"

"Will you believe me if I do this?"

Elias took a step away from Lee Chang-Ryeol and raised his hand. He was telling us that he really had no intention of fighting us.

'Am I being too sensitive?'

It made sense to think that way because if Elias really wanted to harm us, it would have been ideal for him to take Lee Chang-Ryeol as a hostage.

I gulped, and Lee Chang-Ryeol got up quietly and walked away in panic. He slightly lowered his head to apologize, but it wasn't his fault. I patted his shoulder lightly to tell him that he did well, and he lowered his head again.

The momentary lull caused all the guild members to focus on me, and it was as if they were asking me what we should do. It was expected since I was the one who should make the final decision, but the way they looked at me at times like this was kind of burdensome.

'Whoo… '

In the end, I took a step back and raised my hands. Elias didn't seem hostile, and I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to hear him out. Of course, there was a boundary I

wasn't willing to give up.

"Due to the situation, we'll keep our weapons. I hope you understand," I told him.

"If that's what you want… However, please follow the rules," Elias requested.

"What rules are you referring to…" I asked.

"You just need to answer a few questions and wait until Father and Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung are done talking. As long as you move in a way that won't make us feel threatened, we'll be satisfied with that," he replied.

"What happened inside?" I asked.

"I'll explain after we head inside. It's not something we should discuss out here," he said.

"Okay."

Elias seemed like he had a reason not to explain here, and when he bit his lips, he looked as if he were carrying all the worries in the world.

Anyway, the sudden incident ended just like that. Soon afterward, I saw Jung Ha-Yan and Jo Hye-Jin walking from the entrance, and they had to have realized that there wasn't a need to fight after seeing us. Actually, it was more like Jo Hye-Jin realized it because she was calm while observing the situation.

"Oppa!" Jung Ha-Yan called out.

After lightly hugging Jung Ha-Yan, who came running over to me, we started walking again. I felt kind of embarrassed when I saw the mess we made back there, but due to the serious situation, the feeling of shame immediately disappeared. The interesting part was that there weren't enough elves to control us, and even though Elias was here, Jung Ha-Yan should be able to take care of him with no problem. Of course, the other elves were probably blocking the path outside, but if a fight broke out, we would have the advantage. I could see why they were acting this way, and it was all because we weren't trustworthy.

'Elias said he had a question… '

It was confidential, which was why he couldn't let the others hear it. It was highly likely that the conversation he wanted to have with us was the same conversation Kim Hyun-Sung was currently having with the king. I wasn't sure if I were correct, but I would soon find out the answer. After taking our seats, Elias started talking.

"Please forgive us for our rudeness earlier."

"It's fine since we both made a mistake. I'm just glad we were able to work out the misunderstanding," I said.

"No, I think I was being too hasty. I'm very sorry," Elias apologized again.

"I'm sure you had no other choice," I commented.

"…"

"…"

"Have you heard from Elena?" he asked.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"N-No, Elias. I…"

"I didn't ask you, Elena. I asked Father Lee Ki-Young—"

"I don't understand what you're talking about. What are you referring to?" I interrupted him.

"I don't know anything, Elias. I also don't understand why you did something like this. It's rude to treat the heroes who saved the continent like this. It isn't like us to do this," Elena commented.

Elias looked at us after hearing Elena's remark, and he was contemplating whether to talk about it or not. My frustration would disappear if I knew what was going on, but unfortunately, I had no information. It would be nice if he said something. Elias momentarily revealed a serious look. He was contemplating, but we would eventually find out anyway, so his lips moved slightly before he spoke once again.

"The Guild Master of the Blue Guild knew about the condition of the World Tree."

“What?” Elena asked.

“Are you saying you really didn’t tell him anything?” he questioned her.

“I swear that I don’t know anything about this. How…” she replied.

“Do you swear on Elune?” he asked.

“Yes, Elias. I really don’t know anything. I swear that I haven’t said anything about the World Tree,” she answered.

“Then how…”

‘Kim Hyun-Sung… that bastard… ’

I wasn’t sure what was going on, but I knew Kim Hyun-Sung had made a mistake. Based on the situation, the conversation he was currently having with the king was a secret only a handful of elves knew, and I could understand why the elves reacted this way. After all, a human who had just entered the village suddenly started talking about highly classified information privy to no one else but them.

‘They thought Kim Hyun-Sung heard it from Elena.’

I was sure they came up with assumptions regarding this issue, but there was no way Elena would tell us something like that. Kim Hyun-Sung just talked about it because it was an event that happened in his past life.

‘I can’t believe he just went in there and brought it up.’

To him, he was probably thinking that he had nothing to lose, but talking about highly classified information as soon as we arrived was a hasty move. If he knew the elves were hiding something, he should have laid out the foundation before executing it.

‘Annoying bastard.’

Kim Hyun-Sung wasn’t *this* stubborn. Even when bringing up information about his past life, he would always make his move after coming up with a reasonable excuse, which made him seem a bit lacking, but at least he thought about it before making his move. Despite that, the fact that he went this far meant he was *really* thinking

about me. He *really* thought I was running out of time.

'He really goes all out in situations like this.'

He didn't seem to care about how the elves and the party members were questioning him, and I could tell that his experience in his past life was his driving force. It was kind of uncomfortable, but in the end, he was doing it for me, so I couldn't resent him. I actually felt better because all he thought about was saving me, even if it meant people would talk behind his back.

'Well, it is my job to clean up after him after all.'

At this point, I wanted our expedition to fail, but since this could end up being a diplomatic issue, I had to protect him. Cleaning up issues like this was actually enjoyable, and after getting a hint from what Elias said about the condition of the World Tree, I instantly organized my thoughts. This was probably the most reasonable excuse I could make up right now.

"It seems like Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung knows something an outsider wouldn't have known," I said

Elias looked at me and asked, "Did you know about it as well?"

"No, I didn't know, but I had a feeling," I replied.

"What do you—"

"In the Sacred Democratic Country, there's a foreigner who can see the future and the past. Of course, what she can see is limited, but she can see things we're unable to see. Just like Princess Elena," I answered.

"…"

"I don't know what it's regarding, but it's possible that he heard it from her. I don't know the details, but the guild master has maintained a relationship with the shaman of the Sacred Democratic Country," I continued.

Actually, she was closer to me than to Kim Hyun-Sung.

"You mean…"

“You don’t have to worry. She’s not the type to talk about the visions she saw. I guarantee that the others don’t know. Even if a few people knew about it, it won’t harm Everia,” I assured him.

“How… can you guarantee that?” he asked.

“For your information, the other nations must not know that the shaman of the Sacred Democratic Country can see the future. There are probably only about ten people who know her abilities. I trust that you understand what I’m saying, Mr. Elias,” I answered.

“I see,” he commented.

We were on the same side now.

“Now, can you tell us exactly what happened?” I requested.

“*Whoo*…”

“If you feel uncomfortable…”

“No, it’s something you’re going to find out anyway… and I understand why you said that just now. You’re right. Times have changed,” Elias started.

“…”

Elias started talking after releasing a sigh, and although I had an idea about it, I was still curious about the truth. In addition, it would be more legit if we heard it directly from him.

“Father Lee Ki-Young, do you know how we managed to defend ourselves against outside invasions for a long time?” he asked.

“I don’t, but based on what Miss Elena said earlier, probably—”

“Yes, it’s because of the World Tree,” he interrupted.

‘I already knew because I heard it.’

“To be exact, it’s because of the powerful mana that comes out from the World Tree.

It's not an exaggeration to say that we are only able to maintain our kingdom thanks to the World Tree. The forest, the water, and even the smallest things are under its influence. It's because of the World Tree that we were able to keep ourselves isolated. The Everia Kingdom didn't have to worry about running out of resources," he explained.

'He's going into too much detail… '

"It also applies to the barrier that stops the intrusion of outside forces. We were able to avoid great dangers, and we didn't have to use a large amount of manpower because of the World Tree's existence. Until now, that is," he continued.

'So a mage didn't create the barrier.'

It was no wonder why the quality of the barrier was better than I thought.

"Until now?" I pointed out.

"That's right."

'I smell something fishy.'

It was simple.

"When did it start?" I asked.

"42 years ago," Elias answered.

"…"

"42 years ago, the roots of the World Tree started to rot," he added.

There was no point in denying it. We had our own issues to handle, but I knew the elves couldn't have offered their assistance without any reason.

'You guys have been suffering as well… '

The Sacred Democratic Country and Laios weren't the only ones in peril.

CHAPTER 350
THE CITY OF ELVES (5)

The answer was obvious once you thought about the elves' previous situation. Thanks to the World Tree, the Everia Kingdom was able to maintain its privacy, and its citizens were able to live a rich life as well. I finally realized that everything was coming together. The continent's resources were finite, so the reason the Everia Kingdom managed to continuously develop despite being isolated from the outside world was that…

'It's because they have an infinite amount of resources.'

I wasn't sure how the city operated, but it was undeniable that the majority of the elves, the earth, and the water relied on the World Tree. It was the same for the barrier. Historically, the Everia Kingdom had continuously resisted threats from outside, and even though many nations were implementing the Anti-Slavery Law nowadays, it wasn't like that in the past. Powerful nobles mostly bought elf slaves, and there had been many attempts to invade the Everia Kingdom both in national and territory affairs, so the elves' situation back then could easily be deduced. The World Tree was deeply involved, not only in their personal survival but the survival of the kingdom as well. Unfortunately, the World Tree was currently rotting.

'It means that they're on the brink of ruin.'

From their point of view, they had no choice but to quickly find a solution because if the World Tree fell, then the future of Everia was obvious. They would run out of resources, and they wouldn't be able to deal with outside threats anymore. If I were to exaggerate a bit, other nations might send their military to get a piece of Everia's land. I had no idea what was actually going to happen, but it was enough to make Everia's leaders anxious.

It just so happened that a demon was summoned on Laios. The Sacred Democratic Country was still considered a powerful nation, and Laios—famous as a neutral nation for the longest time—was starting to look favorable in their eyes. Naturally, they thought that joining us would help them survive. If they could trade with other nations, then they could avoid the fate of having limited resources. In addition, they

could even get help when they were threatened. I was certain that we managed to convince them to join us even more when we mentioned how we were against black magic, but the core reason was definitely their survival.

I glanced at Elena, and she looked serious. However, I didn't think that she thought about the possibility that there could be a political reason for their participation in the alliance.

'How naive… '

Unlike her, I was sure Elias always made his move after putting everything into consideration.

The Sacred Democratic Country was worried that Everia was using this as an excuse to reap benefits for their own, but Everia was a kingdom the Sacred Democratic Country didn't want to miss out on becoming allies with. After all, the Sacred Democratic Country's political image would improve just by being allies with them, and there were also a lot of resources we could gain from the Everia's forest. However, if we knew their resources were running low, we wouldn't have proceeded with the alliance on equal terms. In some ways, we had gotten scammed, and although I wouldn't call it backstabbing, we did suffer minor damage.

"The root of the World Tree."

"It's still rotting. We have been investigating after finding signs of rot, but we still haven't found the cause. Only a small area was tainted at first, but currently, one-third of the root has been completely tainted, and the speed is very—" Elias explained.

"Fast," I concluded.

"Yes, and it's still getting faster," he added.

"How long do you have?" I asked.

"30 years at most," he replied.

'Wait, that's too fast… '

They were in a desperate situation.

“Then Mr. Hyun-Sung…” I mentioned.

“He said he can fix it,” Elias answered.

“The bro said that?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yes. I’m sure he’s still talking with our father,” he answered.

“Could I see the tree myself?” I requested.

“I’m sorry. It’s not that I can’t trust you, but I’d like it if you could stay here with all of us until His Majesty and Mr. Hyun-Sung are done talking. I promise that it’s not because I don’t trust you. However, please understand that we’re in a very serious situation,” he explained.

“As I have mentioned before, you don’t need to apologize,” I reminded him.

There was no guarantee that we weren’t here to harm the roots, so even I would have made the same decision as Elias. Actually, I thought it was a reasonable decision. It was kind of messy at first, but isolating us was proof that they were being considerate of us and of course, I started wondering about what would happen if things didn’t go well.

‘Kim Hyun-Sung isn’t exactly the slickest talker out there.’

Either way, Kim Hyun-Sung had to return before we could figure out what was going on, and that was when we heard a knock on the door. I was immediately happy upon hearing it, but I became disappointed soon afterward.

‘That bastard.’

I know he was doing it for me, but it was undeniable that he created this situation without saying a word to me. Kim Hyun-Sung appeared with a proud look.

‘Did he succeed?’

It was reasonable to assume that something positive happened. When Kim Hyun-Sung entered the room with a few elves, he started explaining to the guild members while the elves talked to Elias. For some reason, my throat became dry despite the friendly atmosphere. Obviously, I was worried that something unexpected was going

to happen, and I would have no idea about it once again because Kim Hyun-Sung kept it to himself.

I should have done this from the start. The others looked at me when I immediately entered a room without greeting Kim Hyun-Sung, but this was the most effective way for him to reveal the secret he had been hiding.

'You don't know why I'm angry?'

It had been a while since I used this skill after Jo Hye-Jin's case. I glanced at the others, and my eyes met Kim Hyun-Sung's eyes. However, he seemed happy more than guilty. I naturally frowned at that, and he had to have realized that he made a mistake because I saw him running toward me. It was ridiculous how he grabbed the door as soon as it was about to close. The other guild members were wondering what was going on, but Kim Hyun-Sung had to have stopped them because no one followed after us.

"Excuse me, Mr. Ki-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung started.

"…"

"Mr. Ki-Young…" he called out.

"…"

I had to ignore him.

"I was told that you heard the situation from Mr. Elias… Thankfully, it seems like everything worked out. His Majesty did say he'll think about it, but he said he'll give his answer by tomorrow at the latest. He even said he'll think positively about it," he continued.

"I see. That's good," I commented.

"I didn't think it would work out this well…" he added.

"*Ah*… I see," I said.

Kim Hyun-Sung looked a bit anxious when he saw me activate my *look grim* card just like last time. I wasn't sure if he was slow-witted, but he probably thought I would

compliment him if he brought results. I wanted to laugh at how ridiculous that was. I started thinking about how I should start the conversation, but I heard him talk.

"I'm… sorry."

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"I'm sorry for not telling you earlier. I was going to tell you, but my decision was driven by impulse. And I didn't… I didn't want to burden you with different things as well since you're not feeling well," he added.

'Man, I'll feel embarrassed if you say that… '

Kim Hyun-Sung definitely realized his mistake because he apologized, which showed me that he was reflecting on his actions. I honestly wanted to express my frustration a bit more, but after seeing his reaction, there wasn't a need to do that anymore.

"*Whoo*…"

"I'm really sorry," he repeated.

"Mr. Hyun-Sung. I should at least know what's going on…" I started.

"I'm sorry…"

He looked like a puppy out in the rain.

'I can't be weak.'

I had that thought in me, but I had no choice but to give up after seeing his drooping shoulders. Since the atmosphere had already been set, there was no need to pressure him any longer. After I sighed again, I saw him trying to read my expression, but he seemed relieved when he noticed that I started to feel a bit better.

"I don't know how you know about the World Tree's situation, but I told Mr. Elias that it's probably because of Miss Kasugano," I continued.

"*Ah!*"

"I don't know what's going on or how you knew about it, but the details aren't

important. However, I think I have the right to know what's going to happen from now on, I need to know that, at the very least," I added.

'I've done so much for you… '

Kim Hyun-Sung didn't have enough time to come up with an excuse, and I was sure that it wasn't easy for him to tell me this because he seemed like he still wanted to hide the fact that he was a regressor.

"I… didn't think it through," Kim Hyun-Sung confessed.

"No, I don't want an apology. Never. Didn't I tell you before?" I asked.

"What do you…"

'This dense guy… '

He still hadn't caught on to the fact that if he was hiding something, he should hurry up and confess.

I used my *look grim* card again, and he looked like a puppy in the rain once again. As such, I had no choice but to be blunt about it so that he would understand.

"I told you that—at the very least—I should have the right to know what's going to happen from now on, " I repeated.

"…"

"…"

But…" he trailed off.

"…"

Kim Hyun-Sung seemed like he was contemplating, but he decided that it would be best to tell me because he started talking cautiously.

"I don't know how much you heard…"

"I was told that you can resolve Everia's issue," I replied.

“Yes, and I have an idea about the cause. I’m just not certain, and it’s just an assumption…” he said.

‘Assumption, my ass.’

However, what Kim Hyun-Sung said afterward seemed to be the answer.

“A dungeon is probably affecting it,” he said.

“A dungeon?” I asked.

“It’ll be easier to understand if you recall the Cursed Shrine,” he mentioned.

Of course, I understood. It didn’t apply to all dungeons, but certain dungeons could influence their surroundings just by existing. A simple assumption I came up with was that a dungeon was created within the Everia Kingdom. I wasn’t sure if the dungeon was tainting the World Tree and was sucking its nutrients. But if the key to resolving the issue was obtaining the dungeon reward by clearing it, there was a high chance that it was a high-ranked dungeon. This was his way of saying that it was dangerous.

“Do you know the exact location?” I asked.

“I don’t know, but I’m sure it’ll be easy to find. Please don’t ask me how I know about it,” Kim Hyun-Sung requested.

“Okay…”

“The name of the dungeon is Twisted Demon’s Pond. Majority of the monsters are demons, and it’s the same for the named monster. The dungeon rank is above legendary. The dungeon's clear condition is to defeat the named monster and purify the pond. I’m sure we’ll be able to heal you there as well,” he explained.

‘It’s the third one.’

I would have to keep an eye out for more details about the situation, but it seemed that Kim Hyun-Sung believed that the pond could cure my disease as well because it could cure the World Tree.

“I see. Are you saying that the Twisted Pond can treat me?” I asked.

“That’s right,” he answered.

‘I like where this is going.’

I had never imagined that he would confess this much information with just a bit of pressure. I thought he would just give me a simple explanation, but his current expression was a sight to behold. He kept moving his lips as if he wanted to confess something, but he didn’t have the courage to say it. The moment I realized what he was thinking and what he wanted to confess…

‘That’s right, Hyun-Sung. Tell me everything. You know that your hyung is an understanding person.’

“Are you not going to ask?” he asked.

“Ask what?” I questioned.

“How I—” he answered.

“How you know about all of this?” I finished his question.

“Yes,” he replied.

“It’s fine,” I told him.

“What?” he asked.

“You don’t have to tell me that. It’d be a lie if I said I weren’t curious, but I don’t want to put you in a difficult situation,” I answered.

‘This is the right thing to say.’

I gave him the *‘I trust you completely look’* and he looked touched. Moreover, he seemed guilty and was questioning if it was okay to keep lying to me when I trusted him completely. For some reason, it seemed like he was starting to look at me lovingly, and that was when he nodded and started talking.

“Mr. Ki-Young.”

“Yes?” I answered.

“You see—” he paused.

‘Bingo!’

“This may sound crazy, but to be honest…” he trailed off.

I was obviously cheering inside, but my cheers were cut short.

“Hyung-nim! Bro! Come out!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

The disruptor appeared at the right time once again.

‘This bastard… ’

My fists unknowingly clenched.

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